

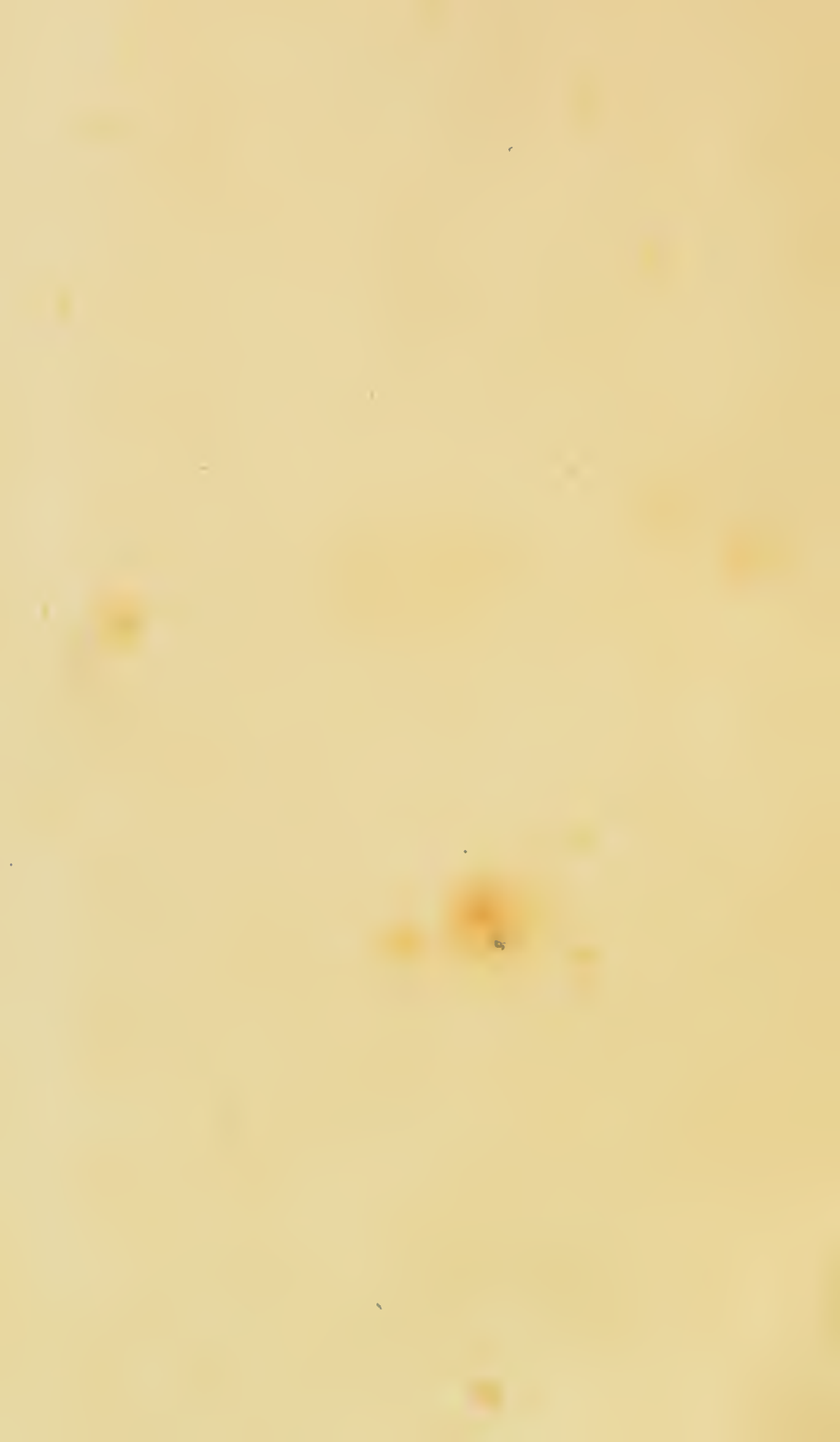
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VANDELEUR.

VOL. III.

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V A N D E L E U R ;

OR,

A N I M A L M A G N E T I S M .

A N O V E L .

Ye shall have miracles, ay, sound ones too,
Seen, heard, attested, everything but true.

Veiled Prophet.

.

I N T H R E E V O L U M E S .

V O L . I I I .

L O N D O N :

R I C H A R D B E N T L E Y , N E W B U R L I N G T O N S T R E E T .

1836.



V A N D E L E U R.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Man may the sterner virtues know,
Determined justice, truth severe.
But female hearts with pity glow,
And woman holds affliction dear.

C R A B B E.

WHAT different scenes are enacting at the same instant on the great theatre of the world ! Tragedy, comedy, farce, melodrame, and all the other varieties that genius or fancy can imagine, proceed, each regardless of the other ; and yet intuitively each performs his part so well, that, under the one great Master-hand, the most opposite parts are made in the end sub-

servient to each other, and all is blended into one harmonious whole.

On the self-same evening on which Gertrude was deserted by her villanous husband, and, all circumstances considered, thrown into a situation as wretched as could well be imagined for a young and delicate woman—delicate alike in mind and body—the mansion of the British ambassador in St. Petersburg, was thrown open to receive a gay concourse of visiters. The beauty, youth, high rank, and splendid fortune of his lady, had created a great sensation even in that cold climate; which, together with her noble character and elegant mind, caused her balls and soirées to be acknowledged as the models of good taste and fashion. No expense had been spared to congregate the luxuries of every climate at her shrine; and at seasons when the inclemency of the weather deprived the hardy Russ of some of his “fair proportions,” the most delicate Eastern rose was seen to bloom in the bosom of the fair Englishwoman.

At the precise moment which this chapter is meant to open upon, she reclined upon a costly divan, of peculiar construction and magnificence, the especial gift of the Emperor of all the Russias to herself. Her dress was a graceful demi-toilette,—or, at least, what might have been considered such, but for the rich jewels with which she was laden; and which, as the *cassette* still lay open beside her, gave the idea of a whimsical fit of indolence; refusing to suffer the annoyance of changing her costume of the morning, even to receive the noble guests of the evening, and compromising the matter by sending for her jewels: while, without moving from her luxurious seat, she glanced her eyes, now and then, to one or other of the splendid mirrors by which the reception-room was surrounded, as she tried on one costly toy after another, and selected those which suited best with her *dégagée* dress.

The occupation and the scene might have become an Eastern princess; while the high and

aristocratic cast of her fine features, together with the air of listless languor which at this moment sat upon them, would not have misbecome the character, had she not been betrayed by her own island's peculiar beauty—the perfect blonde of her rich complexion and silken tresses.

She soon, however, tired of her feminine occupation ; and as it yet wanted an hour or more of the time when she might expect her guests, she took up a book that lay beside her, as if to while away that hour. Apparently, the book had not the power of charming longer than the jewels ; for presently she threw it also from her, and touching a little golden bell that lay within her reach, the attendant spirit appeared.

“ Let baby be brought to me,” she said ; but the answer returned was that baby slept.

“ Pshaw ! I think she always sleeps when I most wish for her,” she muttered half-pettishly, half-fondly : and again she raised her eyes to the beautiful toy which sang out the hours in

sweet music for her ear, as if to drown the hoarse voice of Time, and pointed to the passing moments with a golden rose ; as if music, gold, or flowers could beguile one step of his steady tread, or hide one wrinkle of his furrowed brow !

There still remained the hour to be got over, and seldom did the fair islander feel so little inclination to turn it to account. She yielded to her languor for the present ; and dismissing her jewel-box, rejecting her book, and entrenching herself more deeply in the downy depth of her cushions, she suffered herself to sink into a dreamy slumber. Its duration was not destined to be much longer than that of the other resources she had tried.

Scarcely had she quite “forgot herself” in some fairy vision, when she was startled back to life and all its realities by the massive doors of the chamber being thrown open, and Lady Harriet Stuart announced by one of her English servants. The lady instantly followed on

the announcement, and the door was closed behind her.

The noble hostess started up to receive her ; and casting yet one more hasty glance at the beautiful timepiece, rather apologetic than reproachful, was advancing to receive her guest with her usual grace, when the latter, rushing towards her, wildly flung herself at her feet, and seizing hold of her dress, buried her face in it, and burst into hysteric sobbing.

The lady shrieked—and looking hastily round for her little golden bell, was about to snatch it and ring for assistance, when the stranger, perceiving her intention, seized both her wrists, and holding them gently, but with sufficient force, deprived her of the power of executing her purpose. In this movement, however, she necessarily looked up ; and there was that in the wasted loveliness and woe-begone expression of her face and person, that at once arrested and riveted the attention of her to whom she clung, while it served in part to increase that

lady's terror. She saw, not only that the person before her was not the Lady Harriet Stuart whom she had known in England, but was not any one whom she had ever beheld before. Still, there was something in her beautiful young face, and beseeching though energetic manner, that caused the kind and tender heart of the ambassadress to feel as much of pity as of displeasure, or even of terror.

The stranger's brow was decked with a wreath of jewels ; her once beautiful, but now emaciated arms, were laden with rich workmanship, and altogether her dress was such as might have become an expected guest of the evening.

She perceived the eyes of her unwilling hostess drinking in these strange appearances, and, laughing wildly, she exclaimed, " Yes, yes ! I am decked, lady, but not for you ! I am your guest, but not by your invitation ; and these misplaced emblems of gaiety and mirth are only assumed to elude the vigilance of your servants. You see I am not the Lady Harriet

Stuart; but learning by an accidental observation that she was but a few days arrived in Russia, and was invited here to-night, I trusted to the chance of none of your servants having seen her yet, that I should be able to pass them, and gain access to your presence—under cover of her name, for—the outlawed fratricide Gertrude Evelyn !”

The ambassadress uttered another piercing shriek, not only at this frightful annunciation, but from the very excitement of her nerves at so strange an interview.

“Ay, lady, shriek and shrink from me,” the unfortunate girl continued, “like the rest of an unfeeling and short-sighted world; but know, that as there is a God above us, you are not more guiltless, more incapable in intention of the crime imputed to me, and for which my brain has maddened, and is maddening fast again, than she who now stands before you.” And she arose, and stood indeed a fitting emblem of dignified despair.

There was something in her words, manner, and whole appearance, that spoke to the noble and ingenuous heart of her whom she addressed, with the irresistible force of truth and nature.

“ Sit down—pray sit down,” she said in a voice broken and gasping from agitation and alarm, as she sank herself into her seat ; “ and let me know to what I owe this interview.”

“ Permit me first, noble lady,” said Gertrude, “ to ask one question. Is Mrs. Vandeleur with you in Russia at present ?”

“ She is not ; she is in England : she felt unequal to the journey and the change of climate. Are you acquainted with her ? If so, you have indeed a claim upon my best services ?” answered the Duchess of Castleton ; for we need no longer have recourse to equivocal titles and epithets to disguise that it was she.

“ Alas ! no,” said Gertrude, “ I have not that claim ; and yet it is a deep and deadly disappointment to me to learn that she is not

here, for she would have felt a deep interest in me, and one from which I need not shrink."

"And is there nothing I can do for you for her sake?" asked the duchess, with increasing commiseration, as she saw the pitiable effect her communication produced on the mysterious stranger.

"Oh! much, much! if you will do it;—to shelter and to shield me,—to protect and to advise me,—and, believe me, I deserve it at your hands. You look astonished; but it is even so: the innocent and the oppressed deserve justice and pity at the hands of the powerful and the good. There has been a warrant issued, and which will in a few days pass through your noble husband's hands, to apprehend and bring me and my husband to trial for the murder of my brother. My husband has fled—I believe for ever, from me, on hearing of it; and, oh! lady, I come to you to throw myself upon your mercy for advice and protection."

The duchess's manner and countenance as-

sumed a coldness it had not yet worn, at this, as it appeared, unreasonable claim.

“My protection,” she said, “in such a case is not in my own power to bestow: I am not here to counteract the measures of the government. For my advice, it is, that you render yourself up at once to the laws of your country, which, if you are as innocent as you assert, and as I fully believe, will not fail to acquit you before the eyes of the world. In the mean time, the moments are gliding swiftly over. I am truly concerned that I am so entirely engaged to my friends this evening; but, as I feel certain you would not choose to appear amongst them under your present circumstances, it would be unkind and unfeeling in me not to inform you that they may now momentarily arrive.”

Gertrude’s eye mechanically followed that of the duchess to the timepiece; but to her it presented no idea: her ear only was alive to the cold and chilling words—her heart to the altered manner. She clasped her hands over

her brow, which now burned, while she appeared next moment to become even paler than before.

“What is to become of me?” she muttered in distraction; and, falling upon her knees once more, she clasped her hands together and exclaimed, “I cannot go! Duchess of Castleton, I *cannot* go! If you have the feelings of a woman, take pity upon me, when I tell you that the only man I ever loved—he to whom I was within a few days of being united for ever—lies at this moment in my house, wounded severely by my husband’s hand, and that husband fled I know not whither! If not for the sake of sweet charity, at least for your Mrs. Vandeleur’s sake, grant me your protection, for—my affianced lover is her only son!”

The duchess visibly started, and scarcely suppressed another scream, so great was her surprise at this announcement.

Gertrude attributed her emotion, and the critical glance with which she now again ran over her face and person, to her interest in Mrs. Vande-

leur ; for Godfrey, in confessing to her that he had loved before, had never hinted at the object ; and no accidental circumstance had ever brought the idea into her mind of its having been his mother's pupil.

There was a momentary pause. Gertrude spoke again. "Have I not yet touched your heart ?" she asked imploringly. "I know not how much or how little of my frightful story has reached the public ear ; but if you have any doubts upon your mind respecting me, I will speak to you as might a Catholic at the confessional, and you will not refuse me your sympathy then."

"Did you say that Major Vandeleur was the person to whom you were betrothed, and who now lies in your house wounded by your husband's hand ?"

"I did ; and it is true. But let not that——" Here a violent ringing at the door, and hasty steps and bustle upon the stairs, announced that the guests were beginning to assemble. Gertrude

stopped short in her appeal, and, scared and terrified, seemed disposed to fly she knew not whither.

The duchess appeared little less agitated. She seized Gertrude by the arm. "Tell me in one word," she exclaimed, "as there is truth in Heaven, *ought* I to shelter you? Why is your lover in your house? why 'is he wounded by your husband's hand?"

"Alas! alas! the question shows that you know neither of them. But let *my* being here, speak *my* wishes and *my* feelings."

"It is true—it must be true!" said the duchess hastily. "Come with me:" and they escaped by one door, as the duke, with some of the company of the evening, entered at the other.

"There is no time for ceremony now," the duchess said, as she hurried Gertrude along the passages: "I must, were it only to avoid suspicion, return instantly to receive my guests; and you must consent to become a prisoner in my dressing-room. I cannot even admit my own

women to the secret, as it could not fail to lead to conjecture ; and I would not for worlds involve the duke : so I must e'en lock the door upon you myself, and trust to my wits to make some excuse." So saying, she hurried Gertrude in, locked the door, and depositing in her tiny reticule the weightiest burden that had ever expanded its embroidered sides, returned to her business of the evening.

She performed her part indeed as lady of the revels ; but never in the course of her short and happy life did she acquit herself with so ill a grace, or sat so heavy a cloud upon that noble brow. Her temples throbbed almost to madness ; and such was the excited state of her nerves, that once or twice, when suddenly addressed, she started, and uttered a low and stifled shriek.

Such symptoms in one accustomed to be the life and soul of every assembly, particularly within her own especial precincts, could not fail to attract attention ; and at length, in answer

to the general solicitude expressed for her health, she was obliged to acknowledge an overpowering headache. This avowal of what, in fact, it was beyond her utmost efforts longer to conceal, soon relieved her from her guests ; and offering the same apology to the duke, she bade him a hurried good-night, and fled to the chamber where she had concealed the unfortunate Gertrude.

How had she passed her time in the interim ? Had she been disposed to envy, or even had her mind been sufficiently disengaged for observation and admiration : there was ample food for each and all in the little apartment to which she was thus unpremeditatedly consigned. Her dressing-room, the duchess had called it, and such indeed was its destination—but so tastefully and so splendidly arranged, that every article of furniture or of dress that met the eye called forth an inquiry whether it was not placed there for ornament alone. The brilliant lamp exhaled perfumes ; the mother-of-pearl table seemed en-

adorned with the jewels it was destined to display for its mistress's selection.

But Gertrude had not an eye or a heart for all this ; she only perceived a deep arm-chair, and, throwing herself into it, endeavoured, by pressing her hands on her eyes, and concealing from them all outward objects, to turn them upon herself, and calmly to consider what she had done, and what remained for her to do. The truth soon became sufficiently evident to her, that, whatever power she might have had over the past, little remained to her over the future. She had thrown herself and her fate into the hands of one an utter stranger to her, but whom she had heard Vandeleur mention with esteem, and who, being educated by *his* mother, must be all that was amiable. So had reasoned her fond, youthful heart, in a far-distant country, when she made what appeared so strange a choice as that of St. Petersburg for their temporary residence ; and so whispered her hopes even now, not the less vi-

vidly perhaps from the consciousness that she had no longer left herself a choice.

Nor did she repent of having placed herself in that predicament. The trying interview over, in the calm solitude of the dressing-room, her nerves by degrees relaxed from their excited tone, and she recalled to her recollection the reasons and the principles which had led her to adopt that course. It might have appeared more rational, more consistent with the customs of the world, to have waited until next morning, and formally presented her petition to the duchess. But most of the misfortunes that had already befallen Gertrude were owing to her peculiar ignorance of the customs of the world, joined to a tendency in her character to hold them very light in comparison with her ideas of right and wrong.

She had considered it wrong to remain another hour under the roof with Vandcleur, after all that had occurred; and yet a vague idea that M. Dumoulin would endeavour to overcome

those scruples prevented her from communicating with him. Accordingly, as soon as he left the hotel for a few hours in order to visit other patients, Gertrude, availing herself of the information she had elicited from him, rummaged out some dresses and trinkets, which De l'Espoir had insisted upon purchasing for her, in the prospect of presenting her to the world as his bride ; and decking herself in them, she sent for a conveyance, and directed the man to drive to the house of the English ambassador. The man stared, but obeyed ; and so far all was well.

Gertrude, in forming her plans, had been calm and composed ; but the fuss of dressing, and the strange appearance she wore in her own eyes, like a decorated victim, (to use a worn-out simile,) flushed her spirits a good deal. Then came the thought of giving Vandeleur over to the care of strange domestics. True, she hoped to interest a friend, if not his mother, in his behalf ; and it was only now she recollected how agitated must have been their interview, when she had forgotten to

inquire, or he to mention, whether or not his mother was in Russia. She would have sent now to ask him, but was informed that he slept by the effects of some anodyne, and that the doctor had given orders that he should not be disturbed. She left a note for him, beseeching him to consider all that was theirs in the hotel his own ; and another for M. Dumoulin, bespeaking his attention as a friend to Vandeleur. To neither did she communicate her project ; for she felt, that if the duchess consented to befriend her, she might reasonably choose that it should be kept a secret. This caused her silence to Dumoulin ; and for Vandeleur, for both their sakes, she deemed it better that he should be left in ignorance of her hiding-place.

These considerations, with repeated charges to the woman to be careful and attentive, set her a good deal at rest on the subject of leaving Vandeleur ; but when she found herself actually shut into the carriage, and whirling away, to present herself in so strange a manner, and un-

der such unusual, if not suspicious circumstances, to an utter stranger, her agitation increased to a fearful degree. Once or twice she was on the point of turning back ; but this, she feared, was only a return of her malady, and she forced herself to proceed. And finally, by the time that she arrived, and was shown into the presence of the duchess, she had nearly relinquished all control over her shattered, overwrought feelings, and gave vent to them in the manner already related.

The calmness of the dressing-room, however, as we have said, composed her spirits ; and when the duchess was able to rejoin her, she was agreeably surprised to find a person so different from her she had left a few hours before. Gertrude hastened forward to meet her ; but it was with the subdued and melancholy air of one rationally alive to the peculiarities of her situation, and of the intrusion of which she had been guilty. At the moment that both resumed their seats, it would have appeared that the duchess was the more agitated of the two : she was the

first to speak, however ; for, now that the excitement of Gertrude's nerves had subsided, she seemed incapable of attempting an adequate apology.

“ I am happy to perceive,” the duchess began, “ that your spirits are a good deal recovered from the hurry they appeared to have undergone. I feared that such a lengthened confinement, without refreshment, would have wholly overcome you. I have ordered some to the next room, and from thence I shall convey it to you myself ; for you are by this time, I am sure,” she said with a gentle but expressive smile, “ fully aware how cautious I must be, whether for your sake or my own, of betraying that I have concealed in my dressing-room the person whom you inform me the duke will in a few days be called on to have apprehended. I trust, and I believe, that you will be able in a few words to reconcile me to myself for this apparent breach of public, as well as private duty, when you have had a glass of wine.” So say-

ing, she left the room, and returned, carrying in herself her own especial salver with some refreshments, now become indeed very necessary to poor Gertrude, who accordingly did not refuse to partake of them.

“And now,” said the duchess, who felt her heart rapidly softening, and cautious suspicion slipping as rapidly away, as she gazed upon the pure and beautiful brow of the evidently artless and interesting creature before her—And now, wrap yourself in that shawl, as I shall myself in this one. I have sent my people to bed, saying I cannot sleep for a severe headache ; and, as they have replenished the stove, we shall be as comfortable as your story will admit of.”

Gertrude fully appreciated the considerate kindness of the duchess’s manner, and determining to show her sense of it as far as lay in her power, she commenced at once a full and undisguised account of all that had befallen her, from her betrothal with Major Vandeleur, up to the fatal scene in the harbour at Beauton.

Here there was a complete interruption, not only from her tears and violent sobs, and the tears of the duchess, which now flowed plentifully with hers, but also from her not having completely recovered her senses from the moment of her fainting in De l'Espoir's arms, until she found herself in London, in consequence of a strong narcotic administered to her by her betrayer the moment he perceived her begin to revive, and then so imperfectly, that it will be much more satisfactory to our readers that we should take up the thread.

CHAPTER XIX.

Thou'lt fly ?—as easily may reptiles run
The gaunt snake once hath fix'd his eyes upon ;
As easily, when caught, the prey may be
Pluck'd from his loving folds, 'as thou from me.
No, no ; 'tis fix'd—let good or ill betide,
Thou'rt mine till death, till death Mokanna's bride!
Veiled Prophet.

It was a soft and beautiful night : the moon shone so brightly in the clear, deep, mellow sky, that the lamps of London looked squalid in her beams ; and even in that home of artificial sensations, her pure chastened light wakened in the breasts of many some recollection of the scenes of nature. By far the greater number, however, this glorious sight was unperceived or disregarded. Some hurried on to the midnight revel and the crowded room, as if nothing purer or more animating were within the reach

of man. Some crept along to the haunts of vice, as if there were neither moon nor stars to witness their unhallowed orgies ; while others plodded their weary way to misery and home, for no better reason than that they had not the means of making their way anywhere else. To neither of these three classes, however, belonged two men, who upon this night might have been seen strolling arm-in-arm along some of the darker and least frequented streets in the metropolis ; and yet, perhaps, they both partook in some degree of the two latter.

The taller and elder of the two might be from forty-five to fifty years of age ; but, whatever his years might be, he was evidently old in proportion to them. There was the undefinable air of a foreigner slightly clinging to him still ; but it was neither the lively eye of the Frenchman, nor the dark complexion of the Italian : his was rather of that fair though now faded hue which marks the more northern nations. His brow had some traces of care and anxiety, if

not of want and endurance ; yet his light blue eyes still occasionally gleamed with an expression that seemed to set suffering pretty much at defiance, not in sternness, but in recklessness. His dress was clerical, but had seen its better days.

His companion might have been some twenty years younger,—a dark, meagre, but good-looking Frenchman. He seemed but lately imported from the land of his forefathers ; indeed, from the tone of his conversation, his anxious inquiries into the customs, habits, and manners of the country in which he now found himself, and his probable chance of success therein, he seemed to be but just arrived.

“ And so you would counsel me to return to *la belle France*,” he said, addressing his companion, “ and seek for loaves and fishes there ?”

The clergyman took snuff. “ *Ma foi, oui, mon ami*. The surgeon of a French regiment that fought so boldly against the Holy Alliance is not likely to have much success here. If you

found it difficult to get employment there at present, *here* you will find it impossible ; for these *bêtes* English not only hate Nap and his adherents with all the rancour of ultra-loyalists, but with the far more venomous hatred of inferior minds to a great and powerful rival. *Sacré !* if I thought some former passages in my life were forgotten, I don't know but I should myself return there too, even at this late hour, where I spent many a merry year ;" (his blue eye laughed and emitted a spark of hidden fire ;) "for, somehow, twenty or thirty years' residence in the fogs of England does not render one's French more fluent, especially to one not originally native ; and these d—d English are becoming so knowing upon our hands, that they set up to detect bad French, and to talk of *patois* and provincial accents."

"But *you*—*you*, Monsieur, the clever and the enlightened, and almost a Frenchman, what can *you* have to fear from fastidiousness itself?"

"Good sooth, my friend, a great deal: fa-

shions change in dialect as well as in other matters. I am *now* almost an Englishman : one's ears become brutalized by their guttural tones ever dinning into them ; and for cleverness and all that, I had only too much of it for the age in which I lived. Trust me, it is safer for a man to be a little behind than a great deal before his fellow-men : in the one case, they will turn to help him up ; in the other, they will conspire together to crush him down. I was obliged to hide my light under a bushel in this beef-eating, malt-drinking country. Bah ! their intellects are as heavy as their food, and I do believe their brains grow as fat as their paunches."

"And with such an opinion of them, why did you not leave them long ago?"

"*Pour des raisons, mon ami, pour des raisons !*" making a playful lunge with his forefinger at his companion's side. "*Sacré !* know you not that I used my brains a little too freely at one time in Paris, and found it convenient to make my bow?"

“ I know but little of your history,” replied the young man, “ although your sister’s son. She advised me, when our party got undermost, to fly to you, and seek my fortune under your protection in England. She told me nothing, save of your great genius, worth, and learning ; and so, *me voilà, monsieur !*” taking off his hat, with the bow peculiar to a Frenchman, which always seems to say “ You see how polite I am !”

“ Ah, poor Celine !” exclaimed the elder, “ she ever thought partially of me. Well, well ; she would wonder at the world and despise it, if she saw me now. But we will not think of these things.—Will you take snuff?—Time was, indeed, when Frenchmen and foreigners of all sorts, either of the medical trade like yours, or the *maîtres de Français*, like me, were a rarity here, and during the war could only be gathered *en prisonniers*. But now — now *parbleu !* they are swarming like locusts : and, at this moment, a man *un peu passé*, like myself, is obliged to have

recourse to dyeing his hair, and gluing on a moustache, to prove he has not had time to forget, or—be forgotten. I sometimes think now of trying how far the knowledge I have acquired of English might serve my turn in France.”

“Have you still any friends remaining there?”

“Humph! why, I’m not so sure of that. There is one, indeed, who ought to be my friend in his prosperity, as only good luck saved him from being my companion in adversity. Had you asked me the question a month ago, I should certainly have answered *No!*—for to the many applications I felt myself justified in making to him for assistance, I never received any answer but silence, which in this case could scarcely be taken for consent. However, to my very great amazement, about three weeks ago, when I had given up all hopes, I received a letter from my friend and quondam pupil, assuring me of his deep interest in me, and adding, (doubtless *par hasard*,) that he wanted my assistance in procuring him lodgings in Lon-

don, whither he was coming immediately on some business which required equal despatch and secrecy. Hither he came indeed; but, save sharing my lodging, and giving me a share of his meals while he remained, I have as yet to take either his '*interest*' or '*principle*' upon trust—ha ! ha ! However, he is to be with me again in a few days; and as I have got a rein half-way at least over his neck at present, I may count so surely on some *douceur* as will enable me to give you some supper to-night. So, come along!——But, hey ! *morbleu* ! what's this ?" he exclaimed, as they came within sight of his squalid dwelling; "A carriage at my humble door at this time of night ! and four foaming horses ! Surely it cannot be him returned already ?—And yet—stop you here, my friend, a moment, until I run on and see; and should I enter the house, you must seek your supper elsewhere for this night—ha ! ha !—but never droop for it. Here's my last sixpence, and come to breakfast with me to-morrow.

Hah ! *ma foi*, it is himself—I see him clearly now,” he continued, as he ran towards the door. “ And, in God’s name ! what is that large bundle he is lifting out ?—By this moonlight, it is a woman ! Then he actually has succeeded. Hey ! for better days !—*presto ! presto !*” and he arrived at his own door just as the unfortunate Gertrude was carried, in that deep and deadly slumber, into the house, and laid upon the miserable remains of a sofa which the room, called by courtesy a parlour, afforded, until a bed could be prepared for her.

De l’Espoir took the opportunity to confide to his former tutor, Edelstein, what had taken place. There was, as the reader is aware, that between them already, which enabled him not to shrink from reposing such confidence in him ; and yet, he did him injustice if he expected not to shock him. Edelstein was both grieved and shocked by the transaction, in the most favourable light in which De l’Espoir could place it ; but it was his feelings only that retained any tinge

of their original amiable tendency—his intellects and principles were alike withered and gone. De l'Espoir promised him competence if he should succeed in his undertaking, for his co-operation was necessary : Edelstein forbore all remonstrance, and agreed with him, that all that now remained, even for Gertrude's sake, was to make her his wife as speedily as possible.

“ And this office you must perform for us, my friend.”

The tutor shrugged his shoulders. “ It is so long since I practised, that I have forgotten my trade.”

“ No matter ; we will not be too critical. But a ceremony, however mutilated, must pass between us, or I shall never get her out of this d—d country ; and if I did, she would raise a mutiny in the vessel, and have me thrown overboard *without benefit of clergy*, by way of retaliation.”

“ Is the young lady so very pious, then ?”

“ Oh, she is just everything that will give us

trouble, I fear !” replied De l’Espoir, casting an anxious glance into futurity. “ Hang me ! if I know what to expect from her, after what I have seen of the violence of her feelings ; and since I dare not here attempt a legal marriage, all I can do is to marry her illegally, and keep that little deficiency a secret from her, until I shall have it in my power to make her the *amende honorable*.”

“ But suppose you change your mind, and never make it ? ”

“ My good Edelstein, men have changed in their love to woman, cooled in their hate to man, and forgotten even their thirst for vengeance ; but when were they known to change in their desire for wealth ? Wealth to the mind of man may be considered what the central gravity is to matter : other powers may weaken its effects and render them less strong in one person than in another ; but it is still the grand immutable principle of our nature ; and the proportion of those who resist it, are as the bodies which fly upwards, compared to those of the

opposite tendency. No, no; this is a sweet and pretty girl, little as you can see of her now as she lies there wrapped up in my travelling-cloak : but, believe me, she is fair enough not to scare one from the possession of ten thousand a year, —that is, two hundred and fifty thousand livres of our money. Think of that, *mon ami* ! and talk of my cooling towards her !”

“ Think of it, you, my count ; and remember, that you can never touch a penny of it except by a prompt and legal marriage.”

De l’Espoir laughed a short contemptuous laugh. “ And, in good and sober truth, thinkest thou me such a hot-headed boy as to run the risk I have run with any other view ? When didst thou see me even in early youth yield to my passions beyond my control ?”

“ *C’est vrai, ce n’est que trop vrai !*” retorted the other, with quite as much contempt, but of another kind. De l’Espoir despised his softness, — he detested De l’Espoir’s heartlessness.

But it suited neither of them to quarrel at present ; and the landlady here entering to carry away Gertrude to the room now hastily prepared for her, gave time for the angry feeling of the moment to subside.

The tutor resumed, as if the little digression had not been made,—“ But, granting that I can rake up from the old lumber-room of my brains sufficient prayers to suit our purpose, are you sure that she will not still rebel ; and if we force the golden ring upon her finger, in return slip a hempen one upon our necks ?”

De l'Espoir almost felt it upon his own already, and looked with a kind of envy at that of his friend, which made him not unwilling to bring it to the same level.

“ No,” he said ; “ I have no reason to think that the young lady hates me. We have hitherto been excellent friends ; and at the moment of her extremity she cast herself into my arms from her father and lover. To be sure, there was something at the moment that de-

clared that it was more from fear of them than love to me,—or rather, an appeal to me to explain matters for her, which in other circumstances I should have found it difficult to resist. But, be it as it may, I think I have now arguments enough to use, aided by her present circumstances, to induce her to submit quietly to become Countess de l'Espoir: her own large fortune I touch that minute, and show my gratitude to you; and I shall behave so prettily to her, that I dare say her father (who, *entre nous*, is nearly as young and twice as stout-looking a fellow as myself,) will add a few livres more to it in sheer thankfulness. But we must not lose an hour in getting out of this, for at this very moment there is a hue-and-cry after us."

"I wish to Heaven you were both safe out of this poor house at all events! But nothing can be settled until the young lady wakes from her lethargy: pray Heaven you have not drugged the dose too strongly!"

“Not a bit of it. You are a coward since that little accident in Paris ; but I assure you I went exactly by your orders.”

The tutor shrank with some appearance of horror at the unfeeling allusion. “Ay, ever thus, ever the same—wishing to shift the burden off your own shoulders ; but you fail to make me take it now. If you only did as I desired you, the young lady will wake again ; if not, the blood be on your own head ! And so, good night.” And they shook hands and parted with every appearance of cordiality.

No language, not even when assisted by her own fearful shudderings, and varying colour at the recollections of that dreadful moment, could succeed in conveying the faintest idea of the state of Gertrude’s mind when she awakened the next morning, raised her throbbing temples from her pillow, and looked about her upon a wretched room, still more wretchedly provided. It is almost trite to ask, who has not felt the deadly weight upon the heart, when one first

awakes after a few hours' oblivion of some recent calamity, before memory has had time to re-collect the scattered particulars?—yet there is no other way in which the reader can put himself even partially in poor Gertrude's place. Happily few, very few, have had to recall a calamity like hers.

On first awaking, she hastily sat up in her bed, pushed back the soiled and shabby curtains, then her own stray ringlets from before her eyes, in hopes of finding that all she saw was but the lingering of some hideous dream. It would not do, however : there was no delusion ; she was in some strange and frightful place. She looked on the sleeves of her night-dress ; they were not of the kind she was in the habit of wearing. She tore off her night-cap, and examined it to see if it corresponded in strangeness with all the rest :—alas ! but too fully !

She could not long remain forgetful of the event that had taken place through her instrumentality. On recalling it to her mind and

looking around her, her first idea was that she was in a prison ! A violent palpitation seized her, and threatened her with suffocation. She endeavoured to scream, but had not power ; and a train of nervous sensations, increased by the laudanum which De l'Espoir had compelled her to swallow almost at the moment he carried her from the arbour, succeeded each other so rapidly, that she sank back upon her pillow, almost believing that she had left the abode of men and was given up to demons.

She had lain in this pitiable state, despairing and heartbroken, about a quarter of an hour, when the opening of the room-door aroused her by bringing with it hope of relief. Again she started up, and to her utter amazement perceived the Count de l'Espoir coolly enter her chamber ! Covered with confusion, her first impulse was to conceal herself from his view, and, burying her head in the bedclothes, it was not until he had several times adjured her by everything solemn and serious to allow him

to converse with her for a moment, that she answered, "Then be so good as to retire until I dress and come to the drawing-room!"

"Nay, Gertrude, this is childish, — idle. You know, love, that you are mine now and for ever!"

The unfortunate girl forgot her confusion and every other feeling in these frightful words, and once more starting up, with burning cheek and flashing eyes she exclaimed, "Call my father! call my father instantly! or take me to him this moment — this very moment!" and she flung her arms wildly over her head.

De l'Espoir seized one of her hands, and falling on his knees beside her, implored of her to compose herself.

"But where am I? Tell me where I am!" she reiterated, breathing very rapidly. "Where am I? and why am I insulted by your presence in my chamber?"

"I shall retire, Gertrude, if you will promise

to compose yourself, and to allow me to speak rationally to you when you are dressed !”

“ Retire, at all events, if you please. Dressed ! Yes, I shall certainly dress ; but it will be to fly to my father and my betrothed husband,” she added, gaining courage from desperation. “ Leave me instantly, and let me get ready to set out !”

De l’Espoir suppressed a fiendish smile, and complied with her command to leave the room, but waited impatiently without until she had made her hasty toilette. The moment she opened her door to seek a sitting-room, he met her, and, taking her hand, implored of her to waive idle ceremony where everything was at stake ; and as the house they occupied did not afford a sitting-room,—it having been converted into a bed-room for him and Edelstein, who still occupied it,—to permit him to converse with her in the apartment she had just quitted.

Gertrude, seeing no alternative, was forced to comply ; but it was with an air of the most

haughty dignity that she re-entered the chamber, took her own seat upon the window, and, pointing to the only chair the room contained, intimated her permission to De l'Espoir to sit down also. In spite of his heartless effrontery, he was for an instant almost awed by this new feature in his youthful victim. It was but for a moment, however, that he could yield to so natural, so salutary a feeling. It not only passed away, but he determined to indemnify himself for its transitory existence, by humbling to the earth her who had occasioned it. He was prudent, however, even in his revenge, and resolved not to defeat himself by any such violent measures as should drive Gertrude to despair, unless he found that none others would succeed.

In this spirit, instead of accepting the seat so haughtily offered to him, he flung himself on his knees at Gertrude's feet, and, bewailing "in good set phrase" the unhappy termination of *her* experiment, as he now took care especially to term it, he disclosed the story of his long and hopeless passion !

Gertrude heard him make this declaration with the most loathing indignation. At the mention of her brother's death she wept not and fainted not again. Her feelings were now wrought too highly, without one softening mixture, for either ; and almost everything was merged in the horror and amazement of the situation in which she found herself. At the mention of De l'Espoir's passion a new light seemed to burst upon her mind, and she literally believed it a flash from hell, tinging with its lurid hue the whole deadly transaction. She heard him in perfect silence to the end : she felt too sick to speak ; but the moment he paused, without the slightest comment upon all she had heard, she merely replied with calmness and decision, " Well ! now be pleased to let me see my father."

De l'Espoir was absolutely disconcerted by her self-possession. He endeavoured to recall to her recollection, and with tenfold exaggeration, the indignation of her father and her lover.

" I know it,—I know it all," she answered

with the same apparent composure: “it is indeed all I remember since the one dreadful moment; but I know likewise, that it is not possible that their indignation could outlive one moment,—it was only grief that made them mad. One word from my lips will set them right; or, if not, death at their hands will be welcome. Take me to them instantly,—or rather, I shall go to them myself.”

She rose and endeavoured to pass him. He seized both her hands, and gently but determinately replacing her upon her seat, he affected to struggle a good deal with his feelings before he could bring himself to intimate to her the exact position in which she now stood respecting the fatal experiment. At length, appearing to make an effort over himself, he said :—

“Gertrude, you know not how you stand with your father; you know not how much circumstances are against you: you know little of the science with which you tampered; but they will make it their business to inquire deeply into

it. Trust yourself to me ; you have not another friend : let me become legally so, and I will protect you against the world."

"Never ! so help me Heaven, never ! Release my hands this moment ! Oh, Godfrey ! Godfrey !—No ; rather would I drag out the remainder of my wretched life in the cell of the maniac, or sink at once into my grave, — than owe my existence to becoming your wife !"

"These are professions which all can make," replied De l'Espoir coldly, irritated by the aversion she evinced towards him, "but we see few who can stand the test ; especially—especially, mademoiselle, when their own consciences likewise stand up against them." And he looked on her with a sardonic smile, and eyes, the dark malignity of which nearly scared away the little remains of reason which she was struggling hard to retain ; and which the various agitations she had undergone, and the baneful drugs that had been administered to her, barely left her.

“What do you mean?” she asked, staring on him with amazement.

“Why, I simply mean this : that the very essence of animal magnetism is the *will* of the magnetizer ; and that the effect is *never* injurious, or at least fatal, when his intention is pure.”

Gertrude was still at a loss to understand him, and again asked what he meant.

“In two words, then, I mean, that I subjected you to too great a trial — too great a temptation. The advantages accruing to you from your brother’s death were so great, that, unknown perhaps even to yourself, — at least certainly I believe unacknowledged, — *your will operated to his destruction !*”

By those whose lives have been spent in the world, where so many are ready to vilify our best intentions, and constantly to misunderstand them, and who have consequently learned the necessity of being satisfied with the *mens conscia recti* ; — by the mathematician, who stifles

imagination with the weight of proof ;—or, by the hardened sinner, who has seared his conscience until it has lost all outward sign of sensibility ;—by each of these, and perhaps by many others, the villanous suggestion of De l'Espoir would have been treated with the contempt it merited. But, to the delicate mind, hitherto watched with tenderness and care ; to the young heart, taught to look to the approbation or displeasure of others for its rule of right, simply because others are severer critics than ourselves ; but, above all, to her whose nerves had been shattered and excited to the very utmost,—it sounded like the denunciation of an avenging God, through his minister of wrath !

She leaned back upon her seat with glaring eyes and quivering lips. Her mouth, throat, and tongue became dry and parched. She shut and opened her hands with a convulsive movement, in time to her gasping breath ; and having continued thus for the space of a minute, glaring on De l'Espoir, she fell heavily forwards. He

caught her in his arms, carried her to the bed, on which he laid her, and left the room in search of wine. She did not faint; and when he returned, and held some wine to her lips, she not only swallowed it, but eagerly drank off the remainder, perhaps hoping this time at least the draught he offered might do its work surely. She suffered her head to fall back upon the pillow; and as De l'Espoir anxiously leaned over to see if she had fainted, she suddenly burst into a loud and maniacal laugh,—it was the very voice of misery! it was absolute despair laughing at its own excess!

De l'Espoir's feelings at this moment were far from enviable. Already the doubt had come across him, even before quitting Beauton Park, whether he had not undertaken too desperate a game, and every hour was tending more than the last to convince him that he was mistaken in the tool he had chosen: that, meek, gentle, and complying as Gertrude seemed in ordinary intercourse, her feelings were

deep and fixed, and the very reverse of passive. Even now, when he had struck the last blow on which he depended for success, instead of the puny terror of conviction and of punishment which he had hoped would have led her to seek refuge in his arms, he saw only the deep workings of a morbid and excited conscience.

He contemplated her countenance and whole person contracted in misery before him, and for one moment the thought came across him to despatch her back to her family and make his escape. But then, could he hope that Gertrude would not betray him, and that they would not search him out from the uttermost ends of the earth for vengeance? He believed, indeed, that Vandeleur might pass it over, but the father—the father could not! And what would be the result? Either condign punishment, or at least the loss of the sort of ‘touch-and-go’ character which he had still contrived with some adroitness to preserve. His ruin were effected equally in either way; and would he then

consummate it? —would he, after having run all the risk, endured all the suffering and annoyance—would he now shrink from reaping the advantages which were already, he believed, within his reach, because there yet remained a few brambles to push aside? The thought was dismissed as soon as formed.

He turned once more to Gertrude, and endeavoured to take her hand in order to soothe her ; but the shriek with which she snatched it from him, and the look of terror with which she examined it, as if it had been in the fangs of a wild beast, convinced him that to persevere farther at present were to drive her to actual insanity. Even he was almost struck with pity when he perceived that the last blow he had given was so deadly, that the poor victim, all wretched as she was, no longer presumed to ask to be taken to her father: but whatever effects such pity might have produced in other circumstances, in the present case he reminded himself that self-preservation was his paramount duty. He

determined to make Gertrude his by any means in his power, and then trust to circumstances for reconciling her to her fate.

With this view he sought Edelstein ; informed him frankly of Gertrude's repugnance to the match, and consulted with him what measures were the safest for him to pursue.

“ I must leave England with as little delay as possible,” he said ; “ and in order to do so, should present myself for my passport instantly : but the lady should appear also ; and, in good sooth, she is in no state to do so, nor is it quite safe for me. Come, Edelstein, you who have been here so long and ought to know their ways, can you give me no assistance ?”

“ Why, I do happen, not by being here so long, but by the chance of a family, of which the children had long been my pupils, going to the Continent, to know the routine of these matters, as I assisted them in such preparations. It is not absolutely necessary for the lady to appear, in ordinary cases, to procure a passport ; but,

perhaps the circumstance of a Frenchman carrying off an English wife might make them more particular. Lest it should be so, I'll tell you what you must do. Have you noticed our landlady's daughter who came in to prepare breakfast for us? Would she do at all to personate your fair one? You are aware the descriptions are always very liberal likenesses; in general, if the eyes, hair, and height do not absolutely contrast, it is enough."

"Why, in that case she might do; for I see she has dark hair and light eyes, like this poor girl. But then she must conceal her cherry-cheeks, and act the invalid to the very—*death*, I will say, instead of *life*; for I see Gertrude must be dosed again in order to be got on board."

"Indeed! Are matters so very bad? Think you not it is a desperate business, to say the least? Suppose she die on board?"

"The *least* said is the best," answered De l'Espoir with some irritation. "I cannot now

draw back if I would. She is in no state to return to her friends just now ; and wait here for her recovery I dare not, even were I the chicken-hearted fool you would make me ;—my own affairs all upset, my money-matters arranged for a long absence from Paris : do you think me mad, or are you doting yourself ?”

“ Neither, De l’Espoir. But the truth is this, that both for your sake and my own, I must insist upon your taking into consideration the chance of this girl dying of grief or terror, or both, when she wakes from her second dose and finds herself with you on the high seas. You will not call that success, and my reward will be forgotten.”

“ What the *dévil*, then, is to be done ?” asked De l’Espoir, who knew that Edelstein had at least the right of might to give his opinion, for he had the power of betraying him ; “ what do you advise ?—or rather, in the name of common sense, what remains to be done ?”

A thought had entered the brain of Edelstein.

He was not naturally of a selfish character, but his difficulties had taught him to consider his own advantage before all things. Accordingly, his motives in the proposal he was now about to make were of a mixed nature. He truly felt for Gertrude's misery: even by De l'Espoir's own account he gathered that an affectionate young girl had been made the instrument of death to her brother, and was then to be carried abroad to a strange country, and forced to marry the man who had done this deed by her. The case was pitiable enough. Then if she died, he knew how little hold he should have upon De l'Espoir, whose promise indeed in that case would be null and void; as, except some vague intimations of present gratuity, always seconded by 'the scarcity of present supplies,' his specific reward was to be contingent upon De l'Espoir's receiving the girl's fortune: but then, it was to be splendid in consideration of the delay.

Edelstein had long lost sight of all his own family connexions; but when his sister's son

threw himself upon him for assistance and advice, however lightly he affected to treat the matter, the chord of nature still vibrated at his heart ; and he was ashamed and sorry that, with talents and some good feeling, he had not the means of serving him either by money or by interest : even his vanity was a little piqued when the young man frankly told all his mother had led him to expect.

When Edelstein first asked De l'Espoir what he proposed to do in the event of Gertrude's dying on the passage, his chief design was to suggest to him the idea of abandoning the project altogether. So far he was disinterested. But so lightly seated was the feeling, that the moment De l'Espoir asked " And what the devil can I do ? " the thought struck him, " Take a physician's opinion ; " and it required but one step farther to think that a physician to accompany them was just the thing required, and that his nephew Dumoulin, was just the person. From this moment he abandoned all thoughts

of dissuading De l'Espoir from the enterprise, and even determined to allow his taking the young man with him to go in part payment of the promised reward. He was the more delighted with this project, as De l'Espoir talked of going to America for some time, until he should have brought Gertrude into training, as he called it; and Edelstein knew that if Dumoulin could hope for success anywhere, it might be there: farther, he was especially well pleased to have a friend at court, to keep an eye on the financial department. All that now remained was how to break this matter to the count.

“ Well,” resumed the latter, as Edelstein remained meditating for some minutes,—“ Well, what have you to suggest? for you are plotting something. I tell you, I am afraid to go to the office myself for a passport; for now that three days are well nigh gone by, if those people of hers are not more indifferent than I can believe flesh and blood to be, they will be lying in wait for me just where they know I must go. Could

you not get some friend to do this office for me? Have you never a dark, good-looking fellow in the circle of your acquaintance?" he asked jocularly, in hopes of dissipating the cloud he saw still deepening upon Edelstein's open brow: it would not do, however.

"I'll tell you what it is, De l'Espoir," he said; "I do not like this business. It would be easy for me to comply with your wishes. My own nephew, as dark and as good-looking as you are, is on the spot and at my command; but d—n me! (and that's an English oath which ought to mean a great deal,) if I like to have much more to do with this business. But, at all events, I tell you no passport is required to get from hence to America."

"Ay; but I told you I would not venture to take shipping here for America. *The dose* will take us safe to some French port, and from thence I can contrive to get in some friendly French vessel to America: but this girl's waking in a vessel commanded by an Eng-

lishman would, as I said before, be the signal for my being made food for fishes, if not for themselves. So, come, Edelstein, away with this coquetting: in two words, is this nephew of yours to be trusted?"

"In two words, then, I shall not try," said Edelstein, in his coldest and most determined manner; which was so much the more impressive, as it was foreign to his nature, and very rarely assumed.

De l'Espoir regarded him a moment with a look of deep and searching inquiry; apparently he came to some decision, for he totally altered his tone from the sort of cajolery he had adopted, and with a look and manner quite as determined as that of Edelstein, he said, "Hans Edelstein, you and I have known each other too long to quarrel now on a pretence of principle: in *one* word, then, since two did not suit you, what is your nephew's price?"

"In one word then, that you take him with you. Let him watch over this unfortunate

creature's health for both our sakes; for, I assure you, *I* can anticipate the possibility of her dying of the effects of all this. Let him try his fortune in the New World under the name of your travelling physician; and, in consideration of all this, and of a small sum of ready money now to myself, I will not exact the full amount of the sum I am to receive out of the girl's fortune. Think well before you decline this proposal; for though you may know my circumstances too well to think I could afford to forget self-interest altogether, yet believe me there is no worse friend for an unprincipled man, De l'Espoir, than one just a degree better than himself."

"By Heavens I believe it!" said De l'Espoir bitterly; "I believe what you mean, though I would put it in other words, and say there is no worse friend for a wise man than—a fool."

Edelstein, whose temper was imperturbable, coolly replied, "In the qualities which consti-

tute that latter character, don't forget—obstinacy.”

De l'Espoir ground his teeth ; but still the objections to quarrelling with Edelstein could not be ground away, and after a few minutes' moody silence to digest the surprise, he finally consented to the proposal. After all, Gertrude's preservation was or ought to be his own main object ; and the mere fact of spending a little more money when necessary, was not a misfortune that De l'Espoir, abstractedly, dreaded as much as some others might do.

The two friends, now apparently perfect friends again, were discussing the matter in very different moods from that in which it was first proposed, and had even advanced to chuckling and laughing heartily in anticipation of future success and enjoyment, when a slight rustling in the hall arrested their attention.

“ Are not the women both out ? ” asked De l'Espoir hastily.

“ They are : I saw them out myself, and there is no one else in the house,” answered Edelstein, astonished likewise at the noise.

“ There is, by Heaven !” exclaimed De l’Espoir ; and, springing over the table, he rushed from the room, and discovered Gertrude softly endeavouring to open the hall-door ! She desisted the moment he approached, in hopeless terror ; and, without either of them uttering a word, she suffered him, without an attempt at resistance, to lead her into the room he had just quitted. The only sound that escaped her was such a sigh as might be called a *sobbing sigh*.

Nothing could be more heart-rending than her appearance. She was pale, cold, and subdued-looking. The unnatural excitement had exhausted itself ; and if she had not died from the reaction, she at least retained only such a semblance of life as might be imparted by an effect of galvanism : an occasional violent convulsive start, without any apparent cause, was not inconsistent with this.

Edelstein rose at her entrance ; and although it might be supposed that it was not possible to have presented her to a stranger's eye under more personal disadvantages than at the present moment ; yet such was the chiselled beauty of her features, the luxuriance of her bright hair, and the peculiar air of youth and innocence diffused over her whole person, that the German was struck with pity, admiration, and astonishment at the same moment, and remained standing in a kind of respectful embarrassment, feeling himself for the first time guilty towards her. She took not the smallest notice of him ; but when De l'Espoir brought a chair behind her and attempted to place her in it, she yielded to the movement and sat down. Her eyes had lost all expression, and she blinked and opened them repeatedly, as blind persons sometimes do.

De l'Espoir, instinctively feeling the effect produced on Edelstein, was at a loss how to address her. At last he asked, " Where were you going, mademoiselle ? "

“ To my father,” very faintly but distinctly.

“ But he would not receive you.”

“ Perhaps not.” Another sigh.

“ And then ?”

No answer. This question was beyond the present enfeebled state of her mind. De l’Espoir resumed.

“ To your lover, perhaps ?”

No answer still ; but a momentary tinge upon her cheek showed that she understood him.

“ But he too spurned you, Gertrude.—Gertrude, will you not speak ? You have no friend in the world but myself,” (the poor girl’s teeth were heard to chatter ;) “ let me become your husband. This gentleman is a clergyman ; he will unite our hands.”

He knelt to take hers. She did not withdraw it, and only shut and opened her eyelids more rapidly. “ Why do you not speak, my Gertrude ?” he asked soothingly.

She muttered very low and very quickly in reply, "Because I am trying to keep myself composed, that I may not go mad."

De l'Espoir and his friend exchanged glances.

"But if you would suffer me to soothe you, Gertrude? if you would accept my affection—my caresses?" and he attempted to put his arm round her waist.

If the little animation Gertrude had hitherto exhibited through this scene might be attributed to a galvanic effect, or something at least of life without volition, the spring with which she now evaded the contamination of De l'Espoir's embrace might have given the idea that all the energy, and all the volition she had ever possessed, had been reserved for, and concentrated in that movement. She rushed to the door, but finding it locked, she looked over her shoulder for a moment inquiringly, though very wildly, into the stranger's countenance; and fancying she saw something like pity there, she flew towards

him, and catching him by the arm to support her shaking frame, she said with a look and tone that might have moved a stoic, "Take me to my father !"

Edelstein gazed upon her with infinite compassion. She immediately perceived it, and, falling on her knees before him, she clasped her arms round his, and in the softest accents of entreaty reiterated, "Do, ah ! do ; for the God of mercy's sake, do !"

Nothing in grief or terror could be more beautiful than Gertrude was at that moment. A shawl, which she had wrapped about her for her departure, had fallen off ; and as she still wore the dress in which she had appeared at dinner for the last time in her father's house, her exquisite arms and neck were uncovered, except where her hair now streamed about them : the new excitement had tinged her pale cheek, and her lips were slightly apart from the eagerness of entreaty, and her head was thrown a little back, and her lovely young face was turned up

towards his, with all her ardent soul struggling through it.

Edelstein was sensibly affected, and cast a look of appeal to De l'Espoir ; but the armour of the latter rang of gold, and was not to be so easily melted. He could not indeed be blind to Gertrude's charms, but they served only to reconcile him once more to what he had almost begun to think was a hard bargain !

He feared to approach her, however ; but making a sign to Edelstein, who seemed lost in pity and admiration, to raise and replace her on her chair, he assumed a colder and more determined manner than he had yet exhibited towards her, and informed her that this foolery must have an end ; that his life was in danger, and that he could no longer be trifled with ; in short, that unless she consented at once to become his wife, so as to stand between him and her father's resentment, he would never repeat

the offer, but carry her out of England within an hour.

“ And if I do consent ?” asked the poor girl, losing in a moment the tinge of colour which excitement had lent to her cheek, but at the same time innocently believing that De l’Espoir had at last betrayed unwarily the real motives for his wishing to marry her, and welcoming anything rather than his hateful love,—“ And if I do consent ?”

“ Oh, if you do, dear Gertrude,—why, if you do——”

She looked to Edelstein with eyes that asked an answer: his were carefully averted. She stood up, and seizing his arm, forced him to let his eyes meet hers. The momentary wish (or at least the hope) of softening De l’Espoir, which the poor girl had caught in them before, was vanished now, and had given place to unmixed compassion for an inevitable fate. At one glance she perceived the change: she breathed quickly for an instant—looked once

more at him—let go his arm—and, dropping her head upon her breast, sank into her chair, and seemed to give up all hope.

From that moment she became less and less collected. De l'Espoir perceived her critical state, and that no time was to be lost in consummating his villanous purpose. He repeated his desire for her consent to an immediate union.

“ And if I do ?” she replied again, but in a weak, almost imbecile, whining voice, and without raising her head.

He felt it was no time either to exasperate her feelings any farther, or to strain at trifles for himself. “ If you do,” he said unhesitatingly, “ I will take you back to your father.”

“ Indeed !” she exclaimed, now looking up ;
“ how soon ?”

“ Oh, immediately.”

She pressed her hand on her brow. “ Then I think I will ; I think I ought,—at least, I believe so. God ! I am losing my senses !”

she shrieked out ;—and stood up hastily, turning deadly pale, but sank or rather fell into her seat again.

De l'Espoir flew to support her. She could not spring from him again, but she turned away, shrieking, “No—no—no ! I say *you* are not to touch me. Mind your oath ! Even if I die in your house, *your* hand must not close my eyes, or even bear my pall. Ha ! ha ha ! An auspicious wedding !—Wedding ? Monster ! fiend !” she said, her beautiful face for the first time in her life distorted with rage and hatred, “remember your oath ! And if I do sell my hand from Godfrey, remember, you are that moment to take me to Herbert.” She had exhausted herself, and she fell fainting into De l'Espoir's arms.

Edelstein was assiduous in his endeavours to revive her, and took occasion, while she lay senseless, once more to urge De l'Espoir to abandon the enterprise altogether, and to engage some woman, who knew nothing of the

circumstances, to take the wretched girl to her family.

De l'Espoir cast on him a look of mingled wrath and scorn. "I'll tell you what it is, Edelstein," he said ; "by the g— G— ! if you repeat this trash but once more, I shall take my own measures without your assistance. We are man to man here, and, by G— ! I will take your life, or let you have mine, unless you at once and without farther higgling perform the ceremony the moment she is capable of answering. Swear to me this moment," he said, suddenly letting go his hold of Gertrude, and seizing Edelstein by the throat, his eyes flashing fury almost to frenzy,—“swear to me, by whatever you hold sacred in heaven or hell, that you will second me like a man, and make your own fortune and mine, or I shall dash you to the earth, and crush you like a worm !”

De l'Espoir was an athletic man, and Edelstein the contrary. Had the latter until now even imagined himself his match, the first grip

of his hand would have convinced him of his error. He made no attempt at resistance, but betrayed not any alarm. He smiled with well-assumed calmness, and at once said, as he gently attempted to free himself from De l'Espoir, "Softly, my friend, softly: you are surely beside yourself. I swear to everything you wish. I'm sure I had motives enough to induce me to it before; but I now tell you, if that will satisfy you, that I will marry you to her whether she can speak or not. My soft moods don't last long; so, in God's name, let us to work. Remember, Dumoulin is yet to be spoken with, and the passports to be procured; and I would you were out of my house one and all."

De l'Espoir examined his countenance for a moment: he saw that he was perfectly sincere; the momentary gleam of virtuous compassion had again passed away. He released him from his grasp, and they again turned their attention upon Gertrude.

In a few minutes she revived ; but, though she opened her eyes and looked around her on them both, she lay still and quiet as if from exhaustion. With the excitement, part of the confusion and bewilderment of her intellects had subsided also.

De l'Espoir wished to avail himself of the moment to have the ceremony performed. For this purpose he began once more in gentle and soothing accents to promise, that the moment it was completed he would carry her to her father. She was now sufficiently collected to see the absurdity of this promise, and accordingly, faintly, but most determinately, declared she never would consent to be married to him.

“ Then you know the consequences, mademoiselle ? ”

“ No consequences can ensue so dreadful as that would be.”

“ Don't reduce me to the necessity of proving how vainly you flatter yourself in that.”

“Do what you will, I never will be accessory to my own perdition here and hereafter. While I am free, there is still at least hope.”

“Hope is proverbially a flatterer,” replied De l’Espoir coolly. “It must be something more than hope that will enable your friends to find you out in the remote and distant country to which I shall instantly convey you, and hide you there for my own security.”

The poor girl’s breathing became evidently impeded by terror at this threat; but, thinking it her best plan to seem determined, she endeavoured to suppress all signs of emotion. Alas! could she deceive such interested observers?

“Then it must be done, and without farther trifling or delay,” said De l’Espoir, addressing his friend; and added, as if in pursuance of a preconcerted plan, “Edelstein, call up that coach which is waiting for us: and you, madam, excuse the violence to which you compel me;” and so saying, he seized Gertrude’s shawl, which

lay on a chair, and throwing it over her head, prepared to fasten it so as to prevent her calling for assistance.

The bait took. The unhappy girl, in spite of her previous exhaustion, sprang up, and made convulsive and frantic efforts to free herself; calling out at the same time, "Spare me ! save me ! I consent to everything if you will take me to my father !" De l'Espoir, whose only object was to frighten her, no sooner heard these words, than he suffered her to succeed in throwing the shawl from her head. Such was the effect upon her nerves, that she gasped fearfully, as if already half-suffocated. The wild and heart-rending excitement returned, and in a few minutes she was little better than a maniac.

To conceive Gertrude's situation at this moment, it is necessary to recall all that she had suffered in mind and body for the last two days. Food had never crossed her lips, and her only drinks were those best calculated to excite and

bewilder her intellects. It may be, that many women, in similar circumstances, would have had presence of mind to remain quiet and collected, until some opportunity should offer for claiming protection from the laws of her country, or the compassion of her fellow-creatures; but the young and innocent girl, hitherto watched and tended, if not with fondest solicitude, at least in such a way as to render the idea of danger or of suffering like the visions of a dream, or the tale of a romance — something, in short, which never could come near to *her*—was wholly unprepared for it when it did come, and could neither judge of its extent or remedy. She was far from deficient either in moral courage or in physical endurance; but her mind and strength together undermined, she lost all guidance of herself. She neither knew where she was, nor what had brought her there. She had as yet beheld no living being but her evil genius and his colleague; and when she could think at all, she very naturally thought either that her father

and lover had abandoned her to her fate, or else that she was spirited away somewhere beyond their reach. There was nothing in this world, or in the next, that she dreaded so much as De l'Espoir's love ; and probably, had he continued in that strain, she would even have suffered herself to be carried abroad and buried alive, rather than have consented to marry him. But when he artfully gave as a reason for his pressing the suit, that she might prove a shield between him and her father's resentment, she thought it better even to incapacitate herself from ever becoming the wife of the man she loved, than continue in the power of him she feared and hated, even by suffering the ceremony of marriage to pass between her and that dreaded one. In short, she now grasped at the proposal, as a drowning wretch will, when terror has bewildered his judgment, relax his own useful and rational efforts, to seize the outstretched hand of the enemy who has pushed him into the whirlpool.

De l'Espoir hastened to avail himself of the success of his plan, ere the paroxysm of terror had again time to subside. He made a sign to Edelstein to approach; and, taking Gertrude's hand, intimated to her that the ceremony was about to commence. A fearful shiver ran through her. "Down! down on your knees then!" she said very wildly, "and swear you will take me to my father instantly!"

De l'Espoir indulged her by going through the form she prescribed, and then rose to go through that he considered much more important. He placed himself by Gertrude's side, while she, with glaring eyes, and hair dashed back from either temple alternately, as if to cool them, rapidly repeated the words Edelstein dictated to her from an old prayer-book of his landlady's, but concluded every sentence with the words "in order to be taken to my father;" as if by adding that clause she could either ensure the fulfilment of his vow, or invalidate her own.

The ceremony proceeded, however, without farther interruption than these words, until De l'Espoir attempted to place his own ring upon her finger. She struggled against it for an instant; but, as he succeeded, she shrieked aloud, "Oh, Godfrey ! Godfrey !" and relapsed again into a second fainting fit.

Here was another chasm in her narrative to the duchess. From that moment she had not the faintest recollection of any circumstance that befel her until she recovered her senses six months afterwards in the city of New York.

CHAPTER XX.

That fatal vow, howe'er so rashly given,
Is calmly, deeply registered in heaven.
Nor all the tears that breaking hearts can weep
Avail that page in Lethean drops to steep :
All other woes some remedy may claim,
Save that whose only cure were guilt and shame !

ANONYMOUS.

DUMOULIN, the nephew of Edelstein, was but too happy to accept the offer that was made to him to accompany the Count de l'Espoir and his lady to America. Enough of the story was confided to him, by De l'Espoir's consent, to explain the circumstances that could not be concealed ; and the young man was too wary to pretend that he suspected more.

De l'Espoir succeeded, with his assistance, in procuring passports for himself, his invalid wife, and travelling physician, in a vessel going to

France, and from thence he found no difficulty in embarking for America. The state into which Gertrude had now fallen favoured his schemes to the utmost of his wishes. Instead of the wild vehemence that had hitherto characterised her despair, she revived from the last fainting fit only to a state of listless and silent exhaustion ; there was no farther occasion to excite her nerves, and therefore she was suffered to remain almost in the stillness of death. Food was offered to her, but she neither accepted nor rejected it, or seemed indeed conscious for what purpose it was offered. De l'Espoir was content ; he saw at once, that while she continued in this quiescent state there would be no difficulty in having her conveyed on board.

When, however, the rest of that day and another night passed over without her seeming to wish for food, or attempting even to utter a word, he became alarmed for her life, and hastened to procure for her such delicacies as he thought might tempt her appetite.

He need not have been so fastidious then ; the unfortunate girl, all deranged as she was by the excess of her sufferings, had yet begun to feel the pangs of hunger, and these increased in proportion as the excitement of her nerves subsided. When De l'Espoir himself brought food to her bedside, though too weak to raise her own hand to her lips, she even greedily devoured that which he presented to her. She was, however, too far gone for it to do more than support life : either reason, or all power of exerting it, was fled ; and she continued to lie in a state remarkably like that into which her poor brother was thrown by the fatal accident which first led to all the misery that had ensued.

In this state she was carried on board, unresisting, and probably unconscious of the circumstance. Her bodily organs were, however, unimpaired ; and under the kind and judicious treatment of her young physician, who became deeply interested in one so lovely and so gentle, the exhaustion was soon removed by suitable

nourishment and medicines. But, alas ! it was in vain he watched for the return of her reason. Probably the strange and alarming circumstances of finding herself in a ship at sea, surrounded only by strangers and her cruel persecutor, had confirmed the temporary alienation. However this may be, by the time they arrived in the New World, she was a wild and raving maniac.

Nothing could exceed De l'Espoir's despair, when week after week passed over, and neither Dumoulin nor any other medical man whom he consulted gave him assurance of any amendment. He tried every remedy, however expensive, which held out to him the slightest hope ; and himself treated Gertrude for some time with the soothing tenderness that was pronounced to be essential for her.

At length, just as De l'Espoir's patience was well nigh exhausted, whether it was owing to the influence of a clear American winter, or whether it was only now that the system

that had been pursued with her began to take effect, a sudden improvement became evident in Gertrude's disorder, and from the moment that it appeared to yield at all, her recovery proceeded with a rapidity which could only have been the result of her youth, and hitherto perfect health.

As it was at this point that she was enabled to continue her narrative to the duchess, we shall again have recourse to her own expressions.

“And, oh, God! oh, God!” she exclaimed, after mentioning the first perfectly lucid interval that she recollected, “there need have been no place of punishment created for the wicked if all could suffer here what I suffered then! One thing after another began to strike me as strange; and I was near relapsing into madness from very amazement on recovering from it. God! when I first heard myself familiarly addressed as Madame Lapin—for he had again changed his name—and found myself considered as the wife of the Count De l'Espoir,—oh! I could madden again

over the recollection of that hour !—And yet it was nothing, absolutely nothing to that which succeeded. I had some faint glimmering remembrance of a frightful ceremony which had been forced upon me ; but now, in my recovered senses, I made known my determination not to abide by it—to have its legality at least disputed. Alas ! alas ! why did I betray my intentions ere I had recovered sufficient strength of mind to resist the consequences which the disclosure of them brought upon me ! But I knew not my own lingering weakness until it was too late, and I am lost for ever !”

Here she burst into agonizing sobs ; and the duchess tenderly soothing her, and mingling her tears with hers, besought her to be comforted, and to mention what the consequences were to which she alluded, for that as yet nothing had appeared to prevent her sham marriage from being set aside.

“ Alas ! alas ! no ; it cannot, cannot be !” she sobbed out. “ Oh ! duchess, I can scarcely bring

myself to tell you what ensued. Forget, oh ! do, dearest, kindest lady,—forget the artificial differences between us ; let me treat you really as a dear friend,” she said, with imploring eyes, “ or I shall break my heart, or go mad again.”

The duchess was deeply affected, and threw her arms around her. Gertrude pressed her to her heart, and laying her head upon her shoulder sobbed forth, “ Oh ! duchess, *he, he*—the cruel one, the monster, told me that our marriage, if not strictly binding by the laws of England, was solemnized in the eyes of God by a real clergyman ; and whispered me,—oh ! duchess, that—that I should only bring down eternal infamy on a being—that was yet unborn, by any attempt to invalidate the ceremony !” She buried her face yet deeper in the duchess’s bosom, and the burning of her temples penetrated through its covering.

After a short pause she resumed. “ Ah ! how is it that people can ever expect that language, composed when the mind is at ease and the feel-

ings at rest, can convey any idea of the misery of which the human heart is susceptible ! I cannot believe that there ever was a feeling, experienced by another, to equal the horror of mine at that moment : I really do believe, that had it been less dreadful, less overpowering, less maddening, I should have better resisted the proposal with which he followed it up — namely, the having our marriage solemnized over again ; giving as a reason for this, to any one who should necessarily be informed of the circumstance, that we had previously been married by a clergyman of one persuasion only, and that as his and mine differed, we were anxious to have the ceremony repeated. Let it show you the state of sullen despair into which his communication had thrown me in the shattered state of my mind, when I tell you that I even eagerly caught at this, and we were formally married that evening !”

The duchess with difficulty restrained a scream of horror at this irrevocable step ; but Gertrude felt her involuntary start.

“ Ay, it is but too true !” she cried ; “ I was still half a maniac, at least utterly weakened in judgment ; and lost, as I believed myself to be, I saw no object in rejecting the proposal. But, oh, God ! had I been as I am now, I might have known that it was all a deep and dreadful falsehood. Yes, yes ! that has been spared to me !—it was all a deep and dreadful falsehood ! I never relapsed again into absolute insanity ; but the sight of my cruel persecutor, together with all the returning recollections which his presence so forcibly recalled, for some time had such an effect upon me, that my physicians feared confirmed convulsions or death from it, and I was released from his visits until my health was perfectly restored. He was unaffectedly delighted at this, as it seemed to promise him the harvest for which he had so hardly laboured, and which I, fool that I was ! never even thought of, until he began to hint about my writing to my father, and seconding him in his claims for my fortune. This I positively refused to do. To

betray over to the punishment he had deserved the man to whom I had, however madly, given my marriage vows, was what I certainly never could think of doing ; but, on the other hand, to suffer either my father or Godfrey to believe that I had voluntarily become his wife, would be, I felt, a crime of scarce a lighter dye. He saw that he had no chance of prevailing with me : for some time he grew sullen, and even cruel in his treatment of me ; but seeing this had no other effect than to threaten a relapse into my mental disorder, he changed his plan once more, and endeavoured to prevail upon me to enter into society. This was scarcely practicable where we were ; and at all events nothing could have induced me to appear in public, where I knew I must long have been in private the object of curiosity and conjecture, if not of pity or suspicion. The count wished to return to Europe, but still was not anxious to present himself anywhere that he had been already known, until he should have come to some terms with my poor

father, and, I believe, until he could feel more confidence in me. There was at this time occasionally visiting at our house a gentleman, who was shortly going in an official character to St. Petersburg, and who, having taken a great fancy for M. Dumoulin, my physician, in consequence of an accidental, but essential medical service, which he had had an opportunity of rendering him, was endeavouring to prevail upon him to accompany him thither, where all foreigners of talent were at that time welcomed by its enlightened emperor, and were almost certain of encouragement, whatever might be their profession. As I was now tolerably recovered, and as poor Dumoulin, falling under the general odium which I suspect attached to us all at New York, had not at all succeeded with the public there, nothing deterred him from at once availing himself of this proposal but the fear of letting De l'Espoir out of his sight until he should have fulfilled the engagement to his uncle, of which

I had acquired some intimation, I could scarcely tell how, but chiefly I think from De l'Espoir himself when urging me to apply to my father for money. In the course of conversation on the subject, this gentleman happened to mention that the Duke of Castleton was the English ambassador there, and that the duchess was rendering the place a paradise by her graces and amiability. The name fell like manna upon my heart : I thought of Godfrey's friends, of Godfrey's mother perhaps, being there ; and to one so long an outcast from all that were ever dear, and almost hopeless of ever seeing any one of them again,—indeed, not daring to wish it,—this information seemed like a message from Heaven, to tell me whither to direct my weary steps with the hope of rest. Oh ! the blessed feeling that I should once again be within the reach of a real friend—for such I knew that any friends of his must prove to me. I was now grown wiser by sad experience, and did not give the count my reasons for

petitioning to be taken to St. Petersburg, but suffered him to imagine that it was partly the dread of being separated from my kind and skilful physician, partly the caprice of lingering illness. Happily for me, he was not only at the moment at a loss where to take me to, but was desirous to gratify me in every point, in the hope of winning me at last to suffer an appeal to my father, without betraying the treatment I had suffered. I confess I now allowed him to indulge in this hope, so far as accepting the kindness that I knew flowed only from it, and here in the course of time we arrived. M. Dumoulin having preceded us as travelling physician to his new friend. On our arrival, the first news that greeted us was the death of my poor father, which was announced in very particular terms in some French newspapers which the count procured,—at least such was the account he then gave me of the manner in which the news reached him ; but I have had reason since to believe that he knew it some time before,

but, previous to asserting his right to my father's property, was desirous, by kindness and indulgence, to win me over to conceal all that he had been guilty of ; for he was too unprincipled himself to trust to my principles, unless seconded by my feelings ; and I believe that latterly, even when trying to prevail on me to write to my father, he knew of his death, but made that a sort of test of how far I might be trusted ; for now that such wealth seemed within his grasp, he became very desirous to preserve his character, by hushing up the means by which he procured it. The news of my poor father's death affected me dreadfully : as usual, I traced this new affliction to myself ; and but that I fancied I recognised Godfrey's spirit hovering over me in the particularity of the advertisement, I should in despair have believed that he also was no more, and that I was indeed alone on earth. I became very unwell, but without any return of my mental malady ; and, by way of diverting my mind, the count prevailed upon me to accompany

him to the theatre, where I was found by Vandeleur. There certainly is a fate in everything ; for you may imagine with what reluctance I agreed to appear in public, and so soon after the news of my father's death : though, indeed, on that objection I dwelt but little ; for where all was darkness within already, the form of not going into a crowd had but little weight with me. You already know the recognition which took place there, and all that ensued in consequence. On our first arrival the count had, with the assistance of M. Dumoulin, caused my wardrobe to be fashionably replenished, and gave me the trinkets he had brought to England when under the disguise of a jeweller, and which I really now believe he even then intended for a wedding present, and hoped that the sight of them would help to reconcile me to my fate. Here they are, decking me now, dearest lady ; and to cheat your servants into admitting me to your presence this evening, is the first purpose to which they have been dedicated. May I, O

may I hope that it has not been a fruitless one ?”

The duchess once more embraced her, and assured her of her warmest sympathy. “ But tell me,” she said, “ why you did not sooner address yourself to me, or to Mrs. Vandeleur, since you thought she was with me ?”

“ Alas !” said Gertrude, “ you do not know how different it is for the sick heart at a distance to wish for an indulgence, and when it is near, for the scrupulous conscience to avail itself of it. To be near Godfrey’s mother seemed a sufficient reason for my coming to St. Petersburg ; yet, arrived there, I asked myself if it were not a feeling to be checked, and, at all events, I determined to postpone the gratification of it until it should become either absolutely necessary or irresistible ; for, alas ! alas ! where there is not the shield of love, a woman who would be virtuous must be very self-denying : the indulgence that is safe with that shield, is guilt without it.” She paused.

“ You are an estimable, amiable creature,” said the duchess enthusiastically ; and added, “ and you loved Godfrey very dearly ? ”

“ Loved him ! I loved him with all my heart’s first affections, and I never could have learned to love another. Nor is this romance. I believe it is only when the first object is delusive, and disappoints our fancies of perfection, that we change our sentiments towards it, or can turn them to another. If the heart and mind have once been wholly filled, no other can ever get entrance there ; it is only when some little corner is left unsatisfied, that something or some one else creeps in, and in time shoves out the first occupant : and this is so often the case, that exceptions are called romances.”

“ But all think their own case an exception while they love.”

“ I even doubt that. They endeavour to persuade themselves, and still more to persuade others, that such is the case ; but I believe those are persons who are more enamoured of the pas-

sion than of the object—those, in short, who were predetermined to fall in love.”

“ You seem to have studied the subject deeply,” said the duchess, smiling. “ And does Godfrey love you as truly ?”

“ As truly, I believe he does, but not exactly in the same way. Godfrey loved before ; and I can never believe that any love can be like a first love.”

Gertrude was astonished at the vivid blush that suddenly suffused the duchess’s fine features, and was startled to feel her hand loosen its grasp of hers. She feared she had touched some painful chord, though distant was any surmise she formed from the truth ; she hastened to remove any pain she might have given. “ I may be mistaken, however,” she said ; “ minds are differently constituted ; and, indeed, I do believe that Godfrey loved me as much as ever man loved woman : but this I must think of first love,—while time and circumstances may wear out any other love,

and even turn it to hatred, there is something that clings to the person who has first wakened your soul to its own delicious powers, that invests him or her with a sacred interest — a communion as it were with oneself, that, while that self continues, can never be entirely obliterated. In after loves, we look for gratitude in return for the compliment we pay ; in first love, we are thankful for the blessing of being taught to love ; and though we may never acknowledge it to the world, and scarcely to ourselves, yet we feel a bond of union for that blessing between us and the object, not wholly distinct from that of a child to a parent, and often, I believe, as pure and holy. In short, a second love, if unfortunate, may be repented of ; I do not believe a first ever was.”

“With your ideas of first love,” said the duchess, “I should be sorry my husband or lover had experienced it before.”

“Godfrey is neither husband nor lover to me now : when he was one, and almost the other, I scarcely regretted it. I have said minds are dif-

ferently constituted : I know the uprightness and truth of Godfrey's heart and principles ; and he has often told me that the object of his first love was so unlike me in every respect, that his affection for one and for the other never came even to a comparison in his mind."

The duchess stole a glance at the countenance of her who thus uttered words so immediately concerning herself ; but it was open and unconscious, as her voice was unembarrassed.

"Then you have conversed upon this subject ?" asked the latter.

"Often. I don't think he disliked it, nor did I : the lady seems to have been one of those superior creatures that he was proud to have loved even when the passion had passed away for ever."

"You have no idea who the lady was?" the duchess at last ventured to ask in a low and timid tone, with eyes irresistibly fastened on the ground.

"No. He once begged me not to ask, and I never repeated the inquiry."

“But were you not afraid of meeting her in society?”

“Afraid!—I should be delighted. I love her already for his sake, and I am sure I should immediately love her for her own.”

Gertrude was now as much surprised by the sudden embrace of the duchess, as she was before by her withdrawing her hand.

“You are indeed an amiable creature,” she said once more, as if to account for the movement; “but we must now think about this very serious business. Not a doubt remains upon my mind but that it is my duty as well as inclination to protect you; but yet, so delicate is the matter, that I must not involve the Duke of Castleton in it. This renders my part difficult. In our own England, indeed, I could easily manage it all for you; but here I am intimately acquainted with so few. However, we shall see. In the mean time, day dawns; and as my intellects will be infinitely clearer after a few hours’ repose,

for your sake as well as my own I shall seek it : I recommend—nay, I command you to do the same. Look here,” she said, drawing aside a blue satin drapery, and discovering a fairy couch ; “ consider yourself the most favoured of mortals, when I tell you that you may take possession of that bed to-night.”

So saying, she bade her a kind good-night, and disappeared.

Gertrude at first felt so soothed, so happy, so safe as it were, to be once more in confidence with any one, that, notwithstanding all the causes she had for anxiety and alarm, she believed it would be only necessary to throw herself upon the luxurious-looking couch, to sink into a profound slumber. Such was not the case, however : the excitement and agitation she had suffered, had taken too much hold upon her nerves to be so easily hushed because her reason was in some measure satisfied ; and she had only had fitful snatches of sleep for about an hour, when her kind and benevolent hostess

appeared again in her chamber, in such morning costume as was calculated for driving out to pay visits or take the air. Without waiting for expressions either of surprise or gratitude on the part of Gertrude, she told her she must rise without delay, swallow the cup of aromatic coffee that stood ready for her on the table, and wrapping herself in a large mantle and close bonnet which the duchess herself brought to the dressing-room, follow her softly and quickly to the carriage which waited for them at the entrance.

“ Ask me no questions, dear creature,” she continued, “ but do as I command you, for I am like a thief endeavouring to escape with my prize before the proprietor returns. The duke is luckily gone out for an hour, and we must avail ourselves of his absence to fly, as he must by no means be involved in my quixotism, seeing that such an adventure would but ill become the representative of English government.”

So saying, she hurried through the pompous

edifice which called her mistress for the time, and having placed herself and Gertrude in the carriage, she gave her orders to the servants in so low a tone that Gertrude not only could not catch the sounds, but almost fancied that it was purposely intended she should not.

This, for a few minutes, was sufficient to prevent her asking any questions, and the duchess seemed glad of the excuse to avoid speaking also ; but when Gertrude perceived, that instead of driving to any remote part of the city—or, as she once or twice hoped, in spite of her better reason, to her own hotel, to make inquiries respecting Vandeleur,—when, instead of this, she perceived that they were not only leaving St. Petersburg behind them, but continuing to drive at a steady pace farther and farther into the country, her excitement and alarm became too overpowering for delicacy, and she could not prevent herself from exclaiming in a palpitating voice, “Where are we going, dear kind duchess?”

“Going? where are we going?” repeated the duchess, starting from a fit of anxious abstraction. “Why, I scarcely know if I should tell you yet. Let me see: one suspense I can remove, —we are *not* going to your house. I feared even to send to inquire for your poor friend, lest you might be traced; and, after all, it could have done no good. You are quite sure he is well cared for?”

“Oh yes; I believe all danger was over before I left home. Yet I should have been glad—but I am sure you are right in all you do, and that the greatest prudence is necessary for every one’s sake, as well as my own, and I will not ask another question.”

The duchess smiled a faint and absent smile. She looked pale and anxious; and as the carriage drove rapidly on, she frequently put her head quickly out, then drew back, relieved as it were by a momentary respite.

Presently, however, the road, and the whole face of the country they drove through, began to

assume an appearance that could not pass unnoticed by any one. Even Gertrude, all wretched and anxious as she was, was attracted by it; and although she adhered firmly to her promise not to ask another question, her eyes drank in with amazement the magnificence of the grounds through which they were now driving.

The duchess perceived it.

“ It would be useless, I see, as well as cruel, to endeavour to keep you longer in ignorance of whither I am conducting you. I am going to Tzarsco-Celo, to throw you upon the protection of the empress-mother, and to endeavour to interest her in your favour.”

Poor Gertrude started and changed colour at this very unexpected intelligence. The duchess smiled.

“ Yes, it certainly is an adventure, and will probably be a trying scene for us both. I ought to endeavour to support your spirits, and give you some hints how to conduct yourself; but, in very truth, I am unable. I am myself con-

siderably agitated ; for I am taking a step that *may* give offence, and in that case may prove injurious where I wish to serve."

" But in that case it may also prove injurious to yourself. Oh ! do not—do not, I beseech you, suffer me to spread my baneful influence any farther ! Heaven knows, it has been wide-spreading enough !"

" To myself it can bring no injury, and the duke must not be involved in it. If I can interest Maria Feodorowna in your behalf, you must submit blindfolded to her guidance. You must, my poor unhappy friend, leave St. Petersburg, leave Russia, at a moment's notice, if she procure you the means, or advise the measure."

Gertrude of course could only promise to be implicitly guided by her who had so kindly interested herself in her behalf ; and, clasping her hands tightly together, she lay back in silence in the carriage.

We shall take the opportunity, as they drive

along, to acquaint our readers with the reasons which prompted the duchess to a measure apparently so hazardous. In the first place, the mere circumstance of a measure being hazardous, if it was one that ought to be embraced, was so far from deterring the Duchess of Castleton from attempting it, that the energy of her character, and the unflinching purity and uprightness of her principles, rather led her to seek that most which others were likely to shun. In the mere common course of charity and benevolence, though contributing nobly according to her noble means, she was so far from rendering herself conspicuous, that it might have been almost supposed she was lukewarm. Of the popular subscription which was sure to have many advocates, she never was the patroness, nor did she expend her wit or her smiles behind the tables of a bazaar; but where there was a bruised spirit to be healed, which but for her had broken, or where the good to be performed was invested with a degree of trouble and

annoyance, from which people in general were glad to turn to some gentler ministration, there was the sphere the Duchess of Castleton had chosen for herself. To do the good that others would have done, she felt to be almost selfishness, and considered it to be only useful and acceptable to do that which but for her were left undone ; in short, she did not believe that the great and beneficent Creator of the universe made some of his creatures miserable, for the purpose of affording others an opportunity of laying up a certain quantity of merit by relieving them. No : she believed that God made all nature perfect ; that man disfigured it ;—and that for each to do all the good in his power now, and to prevent all the wrong, was a general concern in which each was alike involved, if not hereafter, at least certainly in this life, as we had all fallen under one general curse ; and that therefore for each to run separately to the easiest task, merely for the sake of saying, “ I have done my share,” were as if the children of

one father were all to rush in to cultivate the fruits or flowers of the garden, and refuse to assist in the rougher but more necessary labour of the field.

With principles such as these, and with a mind that never for a moment suffered itself to dwell on the possible disunion of principle and conduct, the quantity of real good she had contrived to do, even in her short career, was astonishing, and she moved along in her noble consciousness of all things being possible to the willing mind, blest and blessing ! Yes, she was blest herself ; for, although there might have been moments, as clouds will pass over the sun, when she thought of more selfish happiness that once seemed within her grasp, most assuredly she far more frequently clasped her hands and bent her knee in gratitude, for having been enabled to listen to the advice of her inestimable governess, and having thereby established a command over her own mind and feelings, which turned all her thoughts into a

holier, more diffusive channel, and secured her in a situation that enabled her to fulfil her most extensive schemes for the happiness of her fellow-creatures. Even he for whom she could once have cheerfully resigned and forgotten these high aspirings—even he was now placed within her power to serve ; and she felt a thankfulness which she did not fear to offer to the throne of Grace, for being permitted to do so in the way most congenial and acceptable to her delicate feelings and upright principles ;— even through the medium of one who had succeeded her in his affections. There was perhaps but one particle of the leaven of human frailty that mingled in the benevolent schemes or undertakings of the Duchess of Castleton ; and that was pride :—not a low or an ostentatious pride ; but the pride that shrank from putting herself under a compliment to others for their co-operation or assistance ; and she conscientiously believed that if merit could at all attach to anything of the kind, it was to those who dis-

dained not to become beggars for the beggars. Sometimes, when particularly assailed by this many-headed monster, she would make it a point of duty to overcome it, if it stood much in the way of the object she meant to serve ; but she was better pleased when she could make to herself a satisfactory excuse for following its dictates.

Such was the case with respect to the matter she had in hand at present. In England she could scarcely have persuaded herself that sufficient reason existed for her not confiding Gertrude's secret to some friend, or some dependant, through whose means, with perhaps a little risk, she could have either been permanently concealed, or enabled to fly the country : but in St. Petersburg, she told herself that on none had she sufficient claims to authorise her involving any one in her romantic undertaking ; especially while she occupied her present official position, if we call it so ; and, in short, that the only course open to

her to pursue with any propriety, was that which she now adopted, — to throw herself and her *protégée* upon the kindness of the empress-mother, whose elevated situation, while it shielded *her* from any risk in the responsibility, was such, that the Duchess of Castleton herself could not shrink from accepting or even requesting a favour at her hands.

To this she was also particularly encouraged by the character of the empress-mother. The court of Russia is encumbered with much pomp and ceremonial, and is generally considered very difficult of access to strangers ; but such is not the native taste of its imperial family, however they may yield to the dictates of policy ; and, from the time of their great Peter, down to the present, they generally have had some cottage or *ferme ornée*, to which they retired at intervals from all the pomp and circumstance of royalty, to remember that they were mortals, and to conduct themselves as such. But even if this were not the case, what pomp or what

ceremonial would not recede before the dignified elegance of the Duchess of Castleton? or what fastidiousness not feel honoured by her intimacy?

With the empress-mother in particular, she was an especial favourite: for that shrewd and intelligent princess,—whose soul was bent on improving the moral and intellectual condition of her people, and whose highest energies were put forth in founding schools and establishments of various descriptions, that might in time elevate that people to the standard of the nations that surrounded them—so inferior in extent, yet so surpassing in cultivation, that Russia might be compared to an uncut diamond surrounded by polished brilliants;—a princess whose thoughts, time, and revenue were devoted to objects so ennobling,—could not long be blind to the judicious hints and advantageous suggestions to be derived from one of the finest specimens of one of the finest nations in the world. The Duchess of Castleton, again, liberal-minded, and ready to

hail sense and benevolence wherever she met them, failed not to appreciate these leading traits in one labouring under, but struggling to overcome, the disadvantages that beset Maria Feodorowna. Hence, despite many little circumstances that might not have been agreeable to her in another, there grew between them an intimacy that perhaps deserved the name of friendship as much as many other *liaisons* that assume it without question. Concerning her establishments for the education of young females, Maria Feodorowna was particularly anxious; and so often had the Duchess of Castleton accompanied her in her visits of inspection to them, and so many conversations had they held upon the subject, in which the benevolent and maternal feelings of the empress were expressed with the energy peculiar to her, that the duchess persuaded herself that she could not fail in her endeavours to excite her interest in behalf of one so artless, so innocent, and yet so miserable as Gertrude.

Indulging in these hopes, she had recovered tolerable spirits when, according to directions previously given, the carriage stopped at a short distance from the splendid palace of Tzarsco-Celo ; where the empress-mother happened to be staying at the time, and which had originally been a love-gift from the Empress Catherine to her august spouse.

CHAPTER XXI.

The lady strange made answer meet,
And her voice was faint and sweet :
“ Have pity on my sore distress,—
I scarce can speak for weariness.”

Christabel.

ALTHOUGH it was not without mature consideration of the risk that would have attended the delay of sending to the empress for permission to wait upon her at an hour and on a matter so unusual, that the Duchess of Castleton determined upon waiving that ceremony, and confided in the plain good sense and indulgence of the empress to excuse her ; still, when the carriage stopped, and she looked upon Gertrude pale and terrified, and remembered that she had

herself never beheld her or heard of her existence until the evening before, it was with a hand that trembled a little at its own temerity that she sent in a note with a request that it might, if possible, be delivered to the empress-mother without delay.

In as short a time as she could have hoped, an answer was returned that the empress-mother was always happy to see the Duchess of Castleton, and desired that she might be conducted to her presence.

“ You will remain here,” the duchess said to Gertrude, “ until I either return or send for you ; and I beseech of you, endeavour to compose yourself—your suspense shall be as short as I can make it. And now, God bless you ! I must not delay.” And in the next moment Gertrude found herself alone, in a situation which might have appalled firmer nerves.

And moment succeeded to moment, and she was still alone, until at last she began almost to

fancy that she was in a dream. Ere she was able to wake from it, however, the duchess returned.

She looked flushed and agitated. "Come," she said hastily; "the empress has, with some difficulty, consented to see you. It was indeed a bold request of mine; but, as yet, I do not repent it. It is all I can say. You must do the rest yourself. You speak French?—it is well." And without another word being uttered on either side, the duchess hurried her *protégée* through the magnificent apartments of one of the most magnificent palaces in Europe, without permitting her to pause one moment, even in astonishment, had she been so disposed; but, in truth, Gertrude's faculties were too deeply engaged for extraneous objects to affect them much, and there was a floating mist before her eyes that would have caused even brighter objects to look dim.

She followed the duchess in almost breath-

less silence ; and in a few moments, a look expressive at once of anxiety and encouragement, cast on her by her kind friend, and some undefinable change in the manner of the officer who conducted them, as he made a respectful sign towards a door which stood half open, at the upper end of the suite through which they had passed, made her aware that she was about to enter the presence of the empress-mother of Russia. The officer retired with an expressive obeisance ; and the duchess taking the hand of Gertrude, who now trembled so much that she was scarcely able to support herself, led her within that half-open door, and there paused. There was perfect silence and stillness for the space, it might be, of two minutes ; and Gertrude, all bewildered and terrified as she was, had time to recover herself sufficiently to cast a furtive glance round the apartment in which she stood. It was not as extensive as some of those through which they had passed, but appeared to

surpass them all in splendour and adornment: it was almost sheeted with mirrors, of a description far exceeding anything that Gertrude had ever seen before, and the poor trembler shrank back abashed at perceiving her own image form so prominent a part in that imperial chamber. The panels round the room were encrusted with lapis lazuli; and the floor consisted of a parquet of fine wood, inlaid with wreaths of mother-of-pearl. But, dazzling as were these splendid adornments, especially to the eye of a novice, there was an object within that chamber which, though unconnected with them, after the first hasty glance around, riveted the attention of Gertrude beyond them all.

A lady was sitting at a table, with her back towards the door, and bending over something on which she seemed attentively occupied. Several specimens of medals, devices, designs, and mottoes were scattered about her, with various pretty toys formed of ivory, and a tiny appa-

ratus for turning them, so elegant in its form and structure, as to be well suited not only to the hand of a female, but to that of an empress.

It was indeed Maria Feodorowna who sat thus occupied before them. She did not for a few moments seem to notice their entrance ; but from the quickened movement of her fingers as she pursued her task, it would appear that this was rather from an anxiety to complete it without interruption, than from not being aware of their presence ; for presently rising, she took up the little medal on which she had been working, and viewing it in various lights, she quietly turned to the duchess, and without expressing any surprise at her being there, or taking the slightest notice of poor Gertrude, she asked,

“ Do you ever amuse yourself in making designs for medals, Madame la Duchesse, or in making these pretty ivory toys ? — no ! — In England do the ladies consider such things be-

neath them? or, perhaps, too *hard* for them? Are not *hard* and *difficult* expressed by the same word in your English? You are so *solid*, even in your expressions, that you cannot describe or conceive an operation of the mind except through the medium of the body.” And she gave one of those glances which in the gay and feminine court of Marie Antoinette procured her the character of satirical; and which, perhaps, had its effect in causing the agitation of Marie Antoinette herself when the then Archduchess of Russia was first presented to her—an agitation so great as to oblige her to swallow a glass of water to recover her spirits.

There was not much in this reception, if such it could be called, and address, to encourage poor Gertrude; nor was the personal appearance of the empress calculated to diminish the awe which her presence inspired.

She was at that time considerably past what, in the most liberal sense, is termed the prime

of womanhood ; but, from unimpaired health, purchased by early hours and a regulated course of life, and from an animated and varied expression of countenance, the effect of constant occupation and activity of mind, she not only appeared many years younger than she really was, but even retained a considerable share of personal beauty. Her figure was noble and commanding ; and the head-dress which she wore, consisting of a hat surmounted by a full plume of soft and beautiful feathers, added to her height ; a lilac silk dress, made up close about her neck, showed to advantage the fine outline of her form, while it concealed the first inroads of age on the fading throat, and suited well in delicacy of colour to the fair complexion of her German extraction.

Still, as a woman—a mere lovely woman, the empress was decidedly too masculine in her air and manners, which even extended that character in some degree to her appearance. But

in a queen—even in a queen-consort, we are prepared for, if not desirous of finding it so. We have had such sad experience how ill suited a perfectly feminine and lovely woman is to fulfil the duties, and struggle against the trials, of that high station, that we are half tempted to adhere to the old-world maxim, that woman's proper sphere is in the shade. And yet it is a deep question ; for when was England more glorious than while the imperious Elizabeth swayed its sceptre ? or when was the feminine character more outraged than when gentle Mary reigned in Scotland ? In short,

Had great Elizabeth been never queen,
We ne'er had known what Mary should have been :
Had lovely Mary not been frail as fair,
We ne'er had known what gentle queens may dare.

But the season for extremes, the offspring of prejudice, is passing fast away : it is no longer believed necessary that a woman's hand must be either daubed with pastry or with ink, and it

is now admitted that ungartered stockings are not always blue. In these days of liberality, a woman may venture to sweeten conversation with her playfulness and wit, as well as pies or puddings with sugar-plums ; or mayhap may even confide the latter to an intelligent assistant, and while she herself becomes more the companion of her husband than of her cook, his table may be nevertheless elegantly supplied. And surely, surely, when such an incongruous character has once been tolerated as a good housewife and a rational companion, we no longer need despair of seeing justice and mercy, firmness and gentleness, go hand in hand ! We will hope more ; we will hope that since all that ages of experience have summed up as the best and most improving discipline for the human mind, has been lavished on a soil by nature fitted to receive it—we will hope in such a case for all the perfection that human nature is capable of attaining ; we will hope for dignity that

shall display itself in uncompromising principles of right and wrong, instead of narrow bigotry weighing moral truths by early prejudices ; we will hope for that candour, that humility of genius, that will ever ask, is no one wiser than itself?—that, finding such, will make that person's wisdom its own ; or failing such, will examine more deeply into itself, with the awful responsibility of being the fairest specimen of—human nature ! And to what should such a discovery lead ? to the godlike principle of being merciful to that in others to which we show no mercy in ourselves ! And since it is maintained that mind is not matter,—since the science of phrenology, by seeming to lead to a contrary opinion, is by one party looked upon as enthusiasm, by another as infidelity, and the difference of the *bumps* in the head of a male philosopher from those of a female flirt is laughed at as imaginary,—why should it be supposed impossible that a female form should con-

tain the noblest mind ? Let us at least be consistent : though, alas ! when was prejudice ever yet consistent ? We acknowledge the athletic frame, the well-developed muscle, to denote strength and endurance in the trunk, the legs, and arms, but we deny such indications in the head : we confidently pronounce that the broad and open chest proclaims lungs expanded, healthful, and ready to do their office nobly ; but we refuse credence to the like manifestations for the brain. Once more, then, let us be consistent, and denying that mind is matter, let us believe that it cares not in what form it clothes itself, but that the difference between masculine and feminine intellect depends solely upon education. We do not say that such is our opinion ; what our private opinion may be, is of little consequence to the world ; all we are arguing for now is consistency in any doctrine on the subject. How far it is desirable that the two systems of education now so opposite, pursued

with regard to men and women, should be more nearly approximated, is another question ; and perhaps, in accordance with the political economist's principles of the " division of labour," it is best as it is : but there is no rule without exceptions, and when a woman's destiny calls upon her to assume the office that might seem to befit the other sex, we will hope that an education suited to that peculiar destiny cannot fail to render her " wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best ;" and that to the lovely softness of Mary Stuart's character, without its weakness, may be joined the firm decision of Elizabeth Tudor's, without its sternness. Nor is there anything preposterous in the hope, in an age like the present ; although even no farther back than that in which Maria Feodorowna sought to seize the reins of government while they had yet scarcely fallen from the grasp of her murdered husband, and in a country then so far behind our own in moral improvement, it were perhaps impossible for a

woman, especially of high and commanding station, to rise superior to her own sex without assuming somewhat of the deportment of the other. How, indeed, could it well be otherwise, when educated women were so rare, that when such a phenomenon appeared, she was, by necessity as well as mutual consent, driven for companionship to their sole society, and hooted at, and persecuted by her own, like the poor bird who, once noticed and caressed by man, is never again admitted as a companion by its kind?

Still, and with her many disadvantages, Maria Feodorowna was neither revoltingly masculine, nor oppressively pedantic; and they were harsh indeed, who, in one whose chief aim certainly was the improvement of her people, could not pardon a little self-complacency on the success of her efforts. When she first asked the Duchess of Castleton if the ladies of England never employed themselves as she was

then employed, it was probably merely one of those careless questions that are so often asked without even the desire for an answer; but happening to raise her eye at the moment, there was something, perhaps she could not herself have told what, in the exquisitely feminine and refined appearance of the two lovely islanders before her, which told to her acute but jealous mind, that the implied superiority of her occupations was unfelt, and she sought to avenge herself by a sarcasm. It also was unfelt, for the duchess only bowed and smiled; and the empress, too noble-minded long to resent a mortification she had drawn upon herself, presently smiled also, and with good-humoured emphasis continued—

“ Yet, Madame la Duchesse, you must not think the mother of Russia too frivolous. Remember, if you find me designing medals, it is only to present them in return for one struck for me by the *Imperial Academy of Sciences*, in

acknowledgment of the countenance and protection I afforded them. And know, farther, duchess, that these employments are only taken up in our hours of relaxation. When your message reached us, we were engaged in looking over the accounts of some of our establishments; but, being always at the command of the Duchess of Castleton, we quitted our study, and repaired hither to receive her.” And so saying, she threw from her hand the medal she had executed, and pushing the table a little from her, she turned the chair round, and seating herself upon it with the dignity which so well became her, she desired the duchess to be seated also. The duchess obeyed; and the empress then, as if for the first time, turning her eyes upon the faded and shrinking form of Gertrude, kindly said,

“Your young friend too seems in need of a chair. Sit down, young lady: we have heard your frightful story, and pity you from our

heart ; but if you will be guided by us, you will at once resign yourself to your own government, and be acquitted before the whole world ; for it should not be necessary to be Cæsar's wife for a woman to avoid suspicion."

" And if my death, honoured madam, would free me from suspicion, oh gladly would I die !" exclaimed poor Gertrude, roused by this sudden address,—“gladly would I die at all events by the hand of God ; but I do,—oh, duchess, tell the empress that I do shrink from such a trial and such a condemnation.” And sinking on her knees, she buried her face in her hands, and gave vent to her long-suppressed tears.

“ This is sad, this is unpleasant,” said the empress hastily. “ Pray, young lady, restrain your agitation. You know yourself to be innocent of the crime, do you not ? so we understood from the duchess at least.”

“ Innocent ! innocent of intending harm to my brother ?”

And poor Gertrude, though speaking French more correctly than the generality of English women, felt so unable to express the extent of her horror of the crime imputed to her, in any but her native language, which she knew it would be indecorous to use, that she contented herself with turning her pleading and almost reproachful eyes on the duchess, with an expression which seemed to say, "Is this all that you have done for me in your long interview?"

In fact, the duchess had purposely only given such outlines of the dismal story as were necessary to induce the empress to admit Gertrude to her presence, wishing the truth and animation of her own intense feelings to be called into play, to do the rest.

The empress caught the expression of Gertrude's countenance.

"Yes," she said, "the duchess has acquitted you; but I confess I am somewhat at a loss to understand how it is, if you feel yourself perfectly innocent, that you shrink so sensitively

from a trial. Know you not, that if neither you nor your husband appear, you will forfeit your estate?"

"And think you, madam, I should ever enjoy an estate earned by my own hand as the price of blood? And, oh God! of whose blood?" Gertrude exclaimed with more of vehemence than might perhaps have seemed perfectly consistent with the respect due to her to whom she spoke.

The empress paused for a moment, then half smiled and replied, "You are wrong there, young lady, you are wrong. A wish to profit by events as they occur has no necessary connexion with an effort to produce them, or even the desire beforehand for their occurrence. It might be, and probably is so, that this estate, as we understand it to be of noble account, would be better dispensed by you to those who in all countries need the assistance of the wealthy, than by him who seems ready to grasp at it by any means; and the fields will not look

less green, or the crops less luxuriant, because your poor brother was not suffered to live out the years you thought allotted to him."

"Honoured madam, it may be so—it must be so, as your majesty in your wisdom deems it so; but I am a broken reed—no more capable of dispensing blessings to others now, than I am of receiving them myself. Oh, let me but escape and hide myself in some obscure corner of the world, until God recalls me to himself!" and she held up her hands in earnest supplication.

"There is something in all this I do not understand," said Maria Feodorowna, turning to the duchess: "such despair, such heartfelt hopelessness, at her age, where all her intentions were pure and innocent, is past my comprehension; and truly I scarcely know what we can do with her.—Hearken!" she exclaimed suddenly, and turning to a door which opened to the more private apartments of the palace,

"Here comes the empress, here comes our

well-beloved daughter ! You see, duchess, we of the Imperial House of Russia live perfectly *en famille* with each other. Have you not heard so ? Is it the same with your royal family in England ?”

Before the duchess had time to answer, the reigning empress, Elizabeth, entered the apartment, and almost started at perceiving how it was occupied. In a moment, however, recovering herself, she addressed the lady of the English ambassador with dignified courtesy, and, instantly struck with the air of misery and excitement but too visible in Gertrude, she asked if her presence were intrusive.

The empress-mother hesitated for a moment ; then, as if she had come to some decision, she exclaimed,

“ No ; on the contrary, we will hope it is providential. It is said that ‘ in a multitude of counsellors there is safety ;’ and as safety is what we want at present, let us, my fair daughter, have the benefit of your wisdom

on an interesting occasion." And so saying, she drew the empress into the recess of a window, whither in a few minutes beckoning the Duchess of Castleton to join them, she caused her to fill up the details of the dismal story of which she herself had given the outline to the young empress.

The duchess seized the opportunity to enlarge more upon the whole matter, and upon Gertrude's hapless situation, than she had yet done, having found Gertrude herself utterly incapable of doing justice to it. Both the princesses, during the recital, shed tears; and Gertrude, who heard much of what passed, sometimes wrung her hands, and sobbed in convulsive anguish.

When the conference was finished, the Empress Elizabeth approached the afflicted girl, and gazing for a moment on her youthful and exquisitely beautiful countenance, said, "You shall not suffer persecution. Our imperial and much-honoured mother is interested in your fate, and

also the noble Duchess of Castleton" (bowing to her). "It would not answer for her to take you into her household ; but come with me, and I shall keep you as an attendant on myself. I have had an English attendant once before, so that the circumstance need not excite extraordinary suspicion ; only we shall show you as little as possible in public, as yours is not an appearance to pass unnoticed. *Au reste*, we trust that you will find our country residence no loathsome prison."

We may readily conceive the joy and gratitude with which the Duchess of Castleton heard this proposal made to her hapless *protégée*—one so far beyond the utmost she could have ventured to solicit for her ; and Gertrude herself, much as her own secret longings were after the utmost solitude, and most profound retirement from almost all of human kind, felt that it would be madness not to accept, and indecorous not to return thanks for, an offer that promised at least immediate protection ; and

whilst the Duchess of Castleton should continue in St. Petersburg, she persuaded herself she could not feel utterly amongst strangers.

A little plan was hastily sketched out on the instant for eluding surmise and conjecture respecting Gertrude's sudden appearance in the imperial palace; and for this purpose it was arranged to allow it to be understood that she was an unfortunate young lady, a friend of the Duchess of Castleton's, whose husband had died suddenly, and that the duchess had made interest to have her received into the household, to instruct the Empress Elizabeth in the English language. Her emaciated and miserable appearance was well calculated to confirm any tale of woe; and the Emperor Alexander, whose acute mind might have led him to make further inquiries on the subject, especially in consequence of the English warrant, was fortunately still absent, engaged in the momentous discussions which at that period called into exercise every talent, every principle, and nearly every quality

of the highest and the wisest of the sons of earth.

Agreeably to this plan, the Duchess of Castle-ton engaged to send Gertrude the dress proper for a widow according to the English fashion of the day ; and although Gertrude's feelings slightly revolted from this, her own good sense, together with a glance of caution from the duchess, who read her expressive countenance, told her how ill-timed such fastidiousness must prove, when others had run so much risk for her.

The duchess soon after rose to take her leave, fearful alike of intruding too long upon her imperial hostess, and of exciting the curiosity of the duke by her prolonged absence. She once more gracefully and respectfully expressed her gratitude ; and turning to her *protégée*, bade her as cordial a farewell as the circumstances admitted of, and followed the attendant officer from the presence.

Gertrude remained standing for a moment, as if in a state of stupefaction. She had appeared

to receive the adieus of the duchess calmly—coldly—as if mechanically; but she was too new to the world, and her feelings in too much excitement, to remain composed at such a moment. She endeavoured to restrain herself; but it was in vain: as she heard the receding footsteps of her only friend, and looked upon herself as irrevocably shut out from Vandeleur and all news of him, her presence of mind and self-possession utterly forsook her, and either forgetful of the presence in which she stood, or at the moment disregarding all artificial ceremonies in the intensity of her feelings, she suddenly sprang to the door of the apartment, and without one word of apology, or even once looking behind her, flew after the duchess, nor paused until she threw herself, panting from agitation, into her arms.

The duchess, not guessing how abrupt had been her proceeding, only implored of her to compose herself, and to tell her if there was anything more she wished to say.

“ You will not forget me ? you will not lose sight of me entirely ? ” Gertrude sobbed forth. “ Oh, say, say you will not, or I shall not quit you ! ”

“ Lose sight of you I must, my love, for both our sakes,” said the duchess, shedding tears also ; “ but to forget you would be as impossible as to forget that I myself exist.”

“ But you will not lose your interest in me ? Vow to me, that you will watch over me still, my guardian angel ! ”

“ Indeed, indeed I will ; but, dearest, think of where we are, and try not too far our noble hostesses. Command yourself, my love, and suffer me to go.”

“ Oh God ! farewell then ! But, duchess, I must say one word more : it cannot surely be wrong. Will you contrive to learn that he—that Major Vandeleur is attended to ? In *you* it cannot be indecorous.” And she hid her blushing face in the duchess’s bosom.

“ Trust me, trust me, he shall be cared for ! ”

the duchess answered, bending her own cheek over Gertrude's. I shall contrive to have the accident reach the duke's ears, and *through him* every attention shall be paid to Vandeleur."

"Ah, but will you yourself not see that it is done? the duke may have so much to think of; and indeed it is most unreasonable of me to expect that even you can remember or interest yourself in this; but if he *could* know that I am safe—I know it would tend so much to his recovery!"

"He *shall* know it. Trust everything to me, and be assured I shall forget nothing."

"You are an angel upon earth," said Gertrude, raising her head, and gazing on her with an expression of unfeigned admiration, and almost of astonishment.

The duchess shrank from it.

"Nay," she said, "you must not give me more credit than I deserve. Remember, Gertrude, there is but One that can know the

windings of the human heart. If I can escape the slightest tinge of self-condemnation, the slightest reproach of selfishness in all this, it will be a subject for my warmest gratitude. Farewell, and pray it for me. God bless you!" And so saying, she tore herself from Gertrude's arms, and, regaining her carriage, was conveyed rapidly back to St. Petersburg.

Poor Gertrude returned, with slow and pensive steps, to the chamber where the two empresses, although a good deal astonished at her sudden and impetuous flight, and even doubtful of her ultimate return, kindly and condescendingly waited the event.

Gertrude made an attempt at an apology, which, if not very intelligible, was aided by so vivid a blush, and so gentle and subdued a countenance, that it was taken in good part; and she was almost instantly given in charge to one of the ladies of the household, with a considerate intimation, in order to spare her the pain of idle questions and importunities, that

her grief was of too recent a date to endure the slightest allusion to it ; and that, as a friend of the Duchess of Castleton's, she was to be treated with tenderness and consideration, and suffered to live in the privacy that suited her at present. In this privacy we also shall leave her, and look after Vandeleur.

CHAPTER XXII.

They met, but not as they had been
For time had drawn a veil between
That makes familiar things seem strange,
And each was sensible of change.
Their course of life had been apart,
Diverse the history of each heart.
And, now in distant scenes they met,
The past came thronging back : regret
It was not, that with memory came.—

* * * *

Silent they were, though inly glad ;
Seeing, you might have deemed them sad :
And in their oft-averted eyes
Restraint there was, but not disguise,
For neither had a thought to hide.

THE wound which Vandeleur had received, though such as to incapacitate him from all exertion, and indeed for some time to deprive him of recollection, was not by any means dangerous

in itself; and the only apprehension his surgeon felt was of an excess of fever from the violent state of agitation under which he laboured. Finding that neither reason nor argument could prevail upon him even to attempt to compose himself, Dumoulin administered to him a strong narcotic, under the influence of which he fell into a deep and protracted slumber.

It was almost morning when he awakened from it. For some time he was at a loss, as is usual in such cases, to recollect what had befallen him, or where he was; but it only required a few minutes to bring the circumstances of the evening before him.

He sat up in his bed, and perceiving an old woman who had been appointed to watch by him, nodding at his bedside, he put out his hand to rouse her. The woman roared aloud as if a ghost had touched her.

“What is the matter?” asked Vandeleur angrily; “why do you shout in that manner, to alarm the house?”

“ 'Faith, for that matter,” replied the woman, sulky at the prospect of losing the gratuities which she, in common with the rest of the idlers about the establishment, had expected from the French count and his lady, both of whom it now began to be suspected had disappeared for ever, “ 'Faith, for that matter, there are but few in the house to alarm ; and them few, I wish they were alarmed up, and with us ; for, what with the frights of one kind or another I have got this evening, I don't know when I shall be the better of it.”

“ What frights ?” asked Vandeleur ; “ and how do you mean there are but few people in the house ?”

“ Oh, no matter, sir,” replied the woman with recollected prudence. “ You are not to talk ; the doctor says you are to be kept quiet ; so I won't tell you what has happened.”

Vandeleur threw himself back in his bed in despair, lest nothing he could say could overcome such stupid propriety.

“Come, my good woman,” said he at last, “I’ll tell you what it is. You see I am not very ill; that long sleep has restored me. Now, if you don’t this moment tell me what has happened, I shall jump out of bed, run out of the room, lock the door behind me, make my escape from the house, and, as they will be afraid to come to disturb me while you do not appear, you shall be left shut up here, either till you starve, or if I die on the way, as is very likely, until my ghost comes and plays a pretty game with you.”

And so saying, he suddenly put out his hand, and caught her arm in a grasp she could not struggle against. Her only resource was another scream; but as Vandeleur, as soon as he could command his countenance, seemed about to put his threat into execution, she exclaimed, “Oh, lie quiet—for the love of God lie quiet, if you be not entirely mad, and I will tell you everything.”

“Well, do so; and as I judge whether it

is true or not, so I will let go your arm or not."

Thus exhorted, the woman proceeded to inform him of the separate disappearance of the count and countess.

Nothing could exceed his astonishment and despair. Had they arranged to depart at separate hours, but to meet at some appointed place? or was Gertrude gone out upon the wide world alone? were questions which he asked himself, but which he could not answer. He inquired of his attendant if the countess visited much.

"No; they were strangers here: no one ever came near them; and the countess never had her foot outside the door until the evening before the last, that she went to the play; but she was surely going somewhere last night, for she was elegantly dressed out."

Vandeleur was lost in amazement—conjecture it could not be called, for he knew not a single point on which to found even a surmise beyond what he was told.

In this cruel state of perplexity, he counted the tedious hours until his physician called ; and if the latter was surprised at the state of excessive agitation and excitement in which he found his patient, notwithstanding the powerful effects of the narcotic, the patient was not less surprised at the dark and ominous expression of concentrated wrath, which took possession of Dumoulin's features, when Vandeleur adverted to the disappearance of the count and countess.

“ I do not know what to make of it,” said Dumoulin ; “ but this I know, that so sure as he has played me false, and escaped me, I will make him repent the hour. I know more than he dreams I do. My uncle was not such a fool as to send me with him without the rope in my pocket, ready to fling round his neck whenever I should feel it necessary to do so. I had indeed at one time nearly given up all hopes, and left him to his fate ; but since he came here, matters have looked so promising that I thought all was upon the eve of accomplishment.”

“ You seem deeply interested, sir,” said Vandeleur : “ have you then known them long ?”

“ Long enough to do him a mischief if he does me one,” replied Dumoulin ; “ but I shall wait to see, I shall wait to see ; and then, *sacré !*” He ground his teeth in anticipation of his revenge.

“ But can you conceive whither his lady is gone ?” resumed Vandeleur.

“ I cannot. I now recollect, what did not strike me much at the time, that when I saw her last evening, she seemed, though inclined to converse upon indifferent subjects, yet reserved in expressing her opinion concerning her husband’s sudden departure. I am inclined to think she has followed him by appointment.”

Vandeleur groaned.

“ And you can form no idea where he is likely to have gone ?”

“ None. We parted not very amicably yesterday. He was in a devilish bad humour setting out ; and when I pressed the question of

—of—his accession to his wife's property, he evaded it in a manner I did not altogether like ; and we gave up, at his suggestion, an excursion we had proposed into the country."

Vandeleur perceived that there was some connexion between M. Dumoulin and De l'Espoir, which the former did not yet choose to explain ; and as he perceived also that he could give no further information on the subject of the flight, he dropped it for the present, and determined to endeavour by every means in his power—even by the most difficult of all, that of keeping his mind at rest — to expedite his own recovery, in order to be ready, should the opportunity ever occur, to save or assist Gertrude. Such was the sensitive delicacy of his feeling for her, that, when questioned the evening before if he had any friends in St. Petersburg whom he wished to have informed of his accident, he declined even sending for his servant Whitecross, in order to prevent the conjectures that must arise in his mind from the apparently suspicious

circumstances under which he received his wound. With this view, he still determined to dispense with his attendance, and, under all the inconveniences likely to ensue, to remain quietly where he was, for the short time that he hoped would be necessary to enable him to seek his own hotel.

He was not destined, however, to preserve the *incognito* he wished for. Dumoulin had not very long departed from the house, half distracted between anger and curiosity, when a message was brought to Vandeleur, that a servant from the English ambassador was below, with the duke's compliments, and a request to know in what manner he could show his attention to Major Vandeleur's wishes ; "And here is a little note he brought," added the person who delivered the message.

Vandeleur eagerly caught at the billet. It was in a beautiful female hand, and contained but one single line,—“She for whom you are anxious is safe !” It had no signature, and

Vandeleur had never happened to see the duchess's handwriting ; but it was sealed with a device which he had once suggested—a female figure with the finger across the lips as imposing secrecy, and he felt as satisfied of Gertrude's safety as if he had heard a voice from Heaven.

“ My own Gertrude !” he exclaimed tenderly, as he thought with delight on her having had the prudence to fly to the lady of the English ambassador for protection, and as he now traced the duke's attention to her solicitude for his peace of mind. There was something, too, in her having thus unconsciously cast herself into the arms of her once powerful rival, which made her inexpressibly and unaccountably dear to him at that moment.

To the message from the duke, and the precious little note, he returned but one general answer of thanks, and a promise to wait on the ambassador as soon as he should be sufficiently recovered ; and he was obliged to make as powerful efforts to prevent his joy now, as his despair be-

fore, from retarding that anxiously-desired recovery.

Between the skill of his physician, however, and his own determination to recover, the present wound proved very different from that he sustained nearly two years before from the same hand, though probably intended to be much more fatal in its effects. In less than a week he was able to leave his room, and it need scarcely be mentioned that his first visit was to the Duke of Castleton.

He was shown into the duchess's morning apartment, where the duke happened to be at the moment also. He had not until then seen the duchess since her marriage, and the first words that she or the duke uttered, were exclamations from both, at Vandeleur looking so extremely well after his accident. A few moments, however, showed that the high colour which led them into this belief was transitory.

“I am delighted to see you, Vandeleur,” said the duke, “and particularly to-day. I was just

meditating a visit to you myself, and came in to consult the duchess about the expediency of it. I have received a most disagreeable task to-day, and on a frightful sort of subject; and it just occurred to me that it was possible you could throw some light upon the matter, if the stories which have reached me of the circumstances of your wound are true. The matter is this: a warrant has been sent from England, and confirmed by the authorities here, and I am called on to sanction it, for the apprehension of a French gentleman, and his companion, an English lady, for a most extraordinary murder—that of the lady's brother. Similar orders have been sent all over Europe where our people reside; and as I understand a large property depends upon it, no stone will be left unturned to discover the fugitives. Now, is it true that the Frenchman who wounded you was married to an English lady? and have you any objection to mention whatever you know about them?"

Vandeleur had, during the course of this address, ventured, unperceived by the duke, to glance towards the duchess, in order to learn how the news had affected her; but by the determined manner in which she kept her eyes fastened on some elegant trifle of embroidery which she held in her hand, he not only perceived that she was perfectly at ease on the subject of Gertrude's safety, but did not choose that the least sign of intelligence should pass between them.

For one moment the thought shot across his brain, "Could I after all be mistaken, and is she really totally ignorant of the whole matter?" It was a moment of agony, but it passed away; —no one else could have written that blessed line. The duke waited for an answer; and Vandeleur, still in utter ignorance of all Gertrude's plans and wishes, was at a loss what answer to return, lest he might in some manner interfere with them. The duke saw his hesitation, and was about to relieve him from it,

when the duchess rising hastily, said with a smile, "As you gentlemen have thought proper to turn my drawing-room into a court of justice I shall retire; and when you have pronounced sentence you may send for me again."

She was leaving the room, when, as Vandeleur turned to receive her bow, for one single instant, as she stood shaded by the door, she threw herself into the exact attitude of the figure on the seal, and disappeared.

Vandeleur caught the token, and now confined his answer to an assurance of his total ignorance of whither the fugitives had directed their flight. The duke forbore to press the subject. Indeed, the agitation that Vandeleur could not control, on hearing that the warrant for Gertrude's arrest had actually arrived, had not wholly escaped his observation, and he felt politely anxious to change the subject without delay.

They had scarcely fallen into another, when a little confusion of whispering and rustling at

the door was succeeded by its being slowly opened, and a beautiful little girl of three years old being pushed gently into the room by some invisible hand. When once her entrance was effected, she strutted boldly up to the duke, and in the sweet lisping accents of infancy, said, "Papa, mamma sends me to remind you of the appointment you have at this o'clock, and—and—for the gentleman to go away, I believe."

The duke took the child's hand. "Oh no, Theodosia, I am sure that mamma did not say that. I rather suppose it was to ask the gentleman to dine with us."

"No *indeed*, papa, it was not," replied the child eagerly.

"Well, Theo, do you go and ask him now?"

"No, papa; I think mamma wants him away, and wants you to go out."

"Silly, inhospitable child! no," said the duke, smiling; then turning to Vandeleur, "The fact is, the duchess knows that I have an appointment of a very particular nature this

morning ; but if you will return and dine with us, or remain now and send for dress, you will give us great pleasure. I can answer for the duchess, I assure you, notwithstanding the *gaucherie* of this little animal, of whom she is so proud that she takes every opportunity of sending her in to be seen. She ought to teach her better manners," he said, patting the child's head. "But, seriously, she will be delighted, I know ; I assure you she was most anxious during your illness, and almost every little attention that was shown you in my name, was suggested by her ; she has quite an affection for your mother. Do stay ; you now look quite well again."

Vandeleur bowed, but positively declined the invitation, pleading his recent illness and fear of the night-air ; but in his own mind he determined to take some step, either to see or hear from the duchess in private, in order to learn something more of the situation of Gertrude : for although some judicious mediciner "to the

mind diseased" has of old merely prescribed that "no news" is to be taken as "good news," still this negative good is but meagre fare, and will not long satisfy an ardent anxiety.

But the matter was better arranged for Vandeleur. "See now, Theodosia, you have made the gentleman go away," said the duke as he rang for his carriage.

The sweet child looked shy and distressed, and left the room. Presently, however, exactly as Vandeleur's carriage, and the duke's, were together announed, the little girl returned, leading in her mother by the hand, as if to give her an opportunity of rectifying some error, of which she perceived she had herself been guilty.

The duke laughed at the child's consideration, but, saying he had not time to see it out, ran down stairs while Vandeleur was receiving the duchess's apology.

"In fact," she said, "the duke *has* a very particuar appointment, which he will scarcely

now have time to keep, and I also am obliged to drive some miles into the country immediately ; but, as I wished for a few minutes' conversation with you, it made my mind particularly tenacious of the hour."

She paused, and Vandeleur's heart beat high at this announcement. However, as he only bowed, the duchess was obliged to proceed, though with some slight degree of hesitation, which she vainly endeavoured to control.

"I shall not detain you many minutes," she began ; "but there are two things I wished to say to you : the one concerns myself, the other more particularly *you*. I shall dismiss my own part first. I wish to explain the sign which I made to you on leaving the room, and which I am conscious," she said with a vivid blush, and a look of distress at not being able to subdue that blush,—“which I am aware must have appeared strange to you. The explanation is this : The duke is in utter ignorance of every circumstance relating to this dreadful business,

except what he learned officially to-day. I, on the contrary, am in possession of them all—*all* ; and while I believe that there does not exist a monster who could withstand the innocence, beauty, and fascination of the—of your—of *Gertrude* in short, I felt that there would be impropriety and indelicacy in my exerting my influence with the duke, to turn him from the course of his duty. I have therefore taken her protection on myself: I have ensured her safety, and it was at her entreaty I communicated it to you. As soon as the duke gives up this embassy, I intend to make a full confession of my disobedience, not however as is generally the case,” she added with a smile, “until I have reaped all the fruits of it.” She paused, and played with the sunny curls of the child’s hair. “For *Gertrude*,” she continued, seeing that Vandeleur made no attempt to speak, “I absolutely *cannot* tell you more than that she is in perfect safety, and *not* with that wretched man. Of his movements she knows no more than you do.

Where I have placed her, she will remain until this storm is past ; and believe me that no care —no attention on my part shall be wanting to soothe and comfort her. I never saw so lovely, so interesting a creature.”

Having said this, she was slowly rising as if to bid good morning, when Vandeleur recovering his speech, of which he had hitherto appeared to be deprived, exclaimed,

“ Duchess of Castleton ! I will not thank you for your surpassing goodness. Your own heart must tell you all that mine should wish to say.” He stopped, deeply agitated.

“ My dear Major Vandeleur !” she exclaimed in a playful voice, to dissipate her own emotion, “ how you overrate a trifling exertion in behalf of a most interesting and injured being ! They must be hard-hearted indeed who could resist her ; and then you could not, I hope, doubt my wish to serve any friend of yours, or, as the poor people so expressively say, ‘ of your mother’s son.’ My little girl tells me you cannot

dine with us to-day, and indeed I think you are only prudent ; but I hope we shall see you soon again."

She made another movement to end the conversation ; but Vandeleur having now completely recovered himself, said,

"Suffer me to trespass on you a few minutes longer, if indeed your engagement is not of a very pressing nature, and to profit by a goodness which I so deeply feel. Since I must not inquire where Gertrude is, may I not at least be told if she is likely to continue long there? what her plans are afterwards?—in short, Duchess of Castleton, as you are aware of our miserable circumstances, and of Gertrude's peculiarly friendless condition, you will not wonder that I am most anxious, if possible, to have even one interview with her, and to learn from her own lips her intentions for the future. In every point of view, as her betrothed husband, and now her father's executor, it is even my duty to watch over her."

“ Major Vandeleur, believe me, there is not any one can more deeply sympathise in your feelings on this subject than I do ; and it is not with a view to deprive you of the gratification which you so naturally wish for, that I assure you that Gertrude shall never again be friendless or unprotected. I really do not at this moment know her further plans, nor do I believe she does herself ; but I shall see her for the purpose of learning them, in order to satisfy your mind ; and if she will consent to the interview you propose, I shall endeavour to facilitate it.”

“ And may I entreat that you will make her understand, that I have no object now in life but to watch for every opportunity of serving her ?”

“ I will.”

“ And when may I receive her answer ?”

“ I shall let you know as soon as I receive it.”

Vandeleur once more endeavoured to express

his thanks ; but the duchess would not listen to them ; and having made her little girl shake hands with him, she bade him good morning.

Two days passed over without his hearing from her again. On the morning of the third he received a note requesting him to call. He found her alone. She proceeded at once to relieve his anxiety.

“ I requested an interview, Major Vandeleur,” she began, “ in preference to writing to you, partly because Gertrude herself wished that it should be so, and partly because what I have to say may call forth objections, arguments, or entreaties on your part, which might lead to a protracted correspondence, and perhaps not be satisfactory at last.”

“ Have you then seen Gertrude since ?” Vandeleur asked with evident anxiety.

“ Oh yes, indeed I have,” the duchess answered, smiling. “ I have seen her several times in her hiding-place, and I assure you she looks infinitely better than when she entered

there. Be assured, it is no loathsome dungeon ; but you must, I fear, be satisfied with this assurance,—*you must not think of seeing her yourself.*”

“ For how long ?”

The duchess looked down, and seemed distressed as she answered, “ That must depend on circumstances over which none of us have any control. In short, Major Vandeleur, I am sorry to be the messenger of a disappointment to you ; but poor Gertrude is limited at present in confidantes, and therefore I have engaged to say to you from her, that she cannot think of seeing you any more. She implores of you to return to England, and to endeavour to seek for happiness from some other source.”

Vandeleur turned very pale. “ Happiness ! happiness !” he repeated ; “ that is a strange word for Gertrude to mock me with. No ; I think I was born under some planet beneath which happiness is for ever doomed to wither.”

“Do not say so, Major Vandeleur,” said the duchess, pitying the bitterness of feeling under which he seemed to labour; “you have, I grant, been severely tried, but you have surely lived long enough to be a convert to the doctrine at which first youth spurns so contemptuously,—namely, that there are various degrees of happiness, and that it is manifest presumption in any one to murmur if his own be not the highest.”

There was something in the quiet sincerity with which the duchess uttered these words, that, in the irritable state into which Vandeleur’s feelings had been thrown by this message from Gertrude, made him feel them almost a cold-hearted insult; and he said with increased bitterness, “Yes, Duchess of Castleton, it is easy for those to uphold that doctrine who are in possession of all that their hearts can covet.”

The duchess did not raise her eyes; but a gentle smile, and a very faint suffusion, passed

over her beautiful countenance. Vandeleur felt disposed to shoot himself. However, as there was no implement of destruction at hand, he was obliged to content himself with rising hastily from his chair, clasping his hands together, and exclaiming with heartfelt earnestness, "Forgive me, forgive me, duchess !"

"What for?" she asked, now looking up and smiling openly ; "for supposing me in possession of all my heart can covet? I assure you, you are right ; I really am so. I thank God, I can sincerely say, there is nothing upon earth that I covet ; or, lest that word may sound ambiguous, there are few things I have left even to wish for ; and foremost of these few, is yours and Gertrude's happiness. This wish indeed, I fear, is not as likely to be granted as almost all my others are ; for one reason why she wished me to speak, instead of writing to you, is to enforce upon you, against any arguments or persuasions you might use, her unalterable determination to see you no more."

“ In any event ? ”

“ In any event which she permits herself to take into consideration.”

“ And may I not even be informed of her plans for the future ? am I not to be permitted to make myself useful to her in any way ? ”

“ Of her plans for the future she can say little, not having formed any very definitely, beyond remaining where she is at present ; and she particularly entreats that you will give up all intention of watching over her, as the idea of this prevents her mind from regaining that composure she might otherwise in time obtain. Nay, do not look so shocked ; I am sure you cannot but appreciate the feelings which dictate this apparently unkind command.”

“ Let me ask one question ; and answer me sincerely, I beseech. Are these commands the result of her own unbiassed judgment, or are they——”

“ I believe, entirely her own. At least this I know, that I was faithful to my trust,

and gave your message without note or comment. Indeed, had I presumed to give advice, perhaps it might not have been so rigid ; for I am of too proud a spirit to think that there is no safety but in flight. On the contrary, I think that wherever there is a great sacrifice constantly kept up, self-complacency does what constancy never would have done, and invests the matter with a factitious importance which fixes it indelibly in the imagination. However, people's minds and feelings are differently constituted ; and those who differ in opinion from me, I can well believe, may have excellent reasons for doing so. In Gertrude's case I know it to be so. She has vowed obedience to one who would disapprove of her holding communication with you ; and this renders it a positive duty in her not to do so. Let me have the satisfaction of informing her, that you respect her feelings, that you will return to England ; and depend on me, that should any change occur—any opportunity in which you could be

of use to her—you shall immediately be informed of it. I can always know your address through your mother.”

“ And when you and the Duke of Castleton return to England, will Gertrude return there too ?”

“ At present, she says not ; she declares she would rather bury herself in the farthest corner of the earth, than ever appear there again : but these feelings may subside.”

“ You have yourself no idea of when you shall return ?”

“ Why no. There is, you know, some rumour of a change of ministry ; but the duke does not think it likely to take place ; and if not, we both like our residence here well enough to remain for some time longer. You know it was *my* fancy to come : I always had a great curiosity about Russia since the agreeable emperor was with us, and had very little hope of satisfying it in any other way ; so I must not be impatient now.”

Vandeleur fell into a gloomy reverie. He had indeed very little now on earth to cheer him. The thought even came across him, of how ill he had been rewarded for the command which he had formerly exercised over his feelings with respect to Lady Seaton; but from this he started at once, as every way unworthy of her, of himself,—perhaps, most of all, of Gertrude. He next glanced with momentary regret on having given up his profession; but from this he also turned away, for he felt conscious that he could no longer have maintained the character there which he had so justly acquired. He felt desolate and wayward, and seemed disposed to indulge in a protracted silence.

“Come,” said the duchess, “I must rouse you from this abstraction, even by telling you to imitate your own Gertrude. She sees her duty and performs it. You surely will not be a stumbling-block in her way, by hovering about her, when she has confessed it to be

essential to her peace that you should return to your own country?"

"No! let her be assured that I will *not* be a stumbling-block in her way."

"Nay, I will not deliver this message either. I am not one of those rigidly right who think that fire and sword should be employed to keep asunder two hearts which fate will not permit to be united in the closest bonds; because I no more believe in the frailty that makes it impossible to confine the indulgence within proper bounds, than I can think that the absence of temptation constitutes purity: but, at the same time, if from any circumstance either party wishes for that separation, I think they are guilty indeed who counteract that prudence. Come, say you will obey Gertrude's behests, for she is indeed an angel."

"She is," said Vandeleur warmly, and heaving off a load of waywardness and indecision with a deep sigh, he added, "and she is

not alone in that character even upon earth. I *will* obey your and her commands ; I shall return to England : but, Duchess of Castleton, you will be merciful to me ?” he said with deep and emphatic pleading in his voice and countenance ; “ you will remember my wretched situation, and let me hear sometimes of Gertrude ? I am aware of the extent of what I ask.”

“ My dear Major Vandeleur, I shall have the greatest pleasure in complying with your request : indeed I should have done so without it. Your mother and I correspond regularly ; but now my letters to her will be more frequent, and much more interesting. Farewell ! I shall be anxious to hear from her how you fulfil the spirit of our injunctions ; and pray be always assured of my kindest regard and esteem.” She held out her hand, and Vandeleur pressed it respectfully, affectionately. If a tear dropped on it, Gertrude herself might have analysed that tear.

The door had nearly closed upon his receding figure, when he hastily re-entered the room and said, “Duchess of Castleton, I *will* trespass one step farther; it will probably be the last, and you will forgive it. Will you see Gertrude once more? will you tell her that I obey? And suffer me to wait upon you once more, to learn how she receives the communication, how she feels when she learns that I too have appeared to abandon her; and ask her at least if there is nothing that I can do for her in England? nothing that she would like to have sent to her from Beauton?”

The duchess complied with this request also; but if Vandeleur had in his secret soul founded any hope upon it, of a revocation of Gertrude’s orders, he was disappointed: the only message she sent to him was heartfelt thanks for his obedience; the only commission, a request that he would destroy his own letters, which were in the little letter-box which he had sent to her in happier days, for the purpose of containing

them, and of which she now sent him the key.

“ I am to go then,” he said. “ But if your stay in St. Petersburg should be long protracted, I may return, even without any hope of seeing her.”

“ We cannot, of course, control your movements any farther than as concerns her.”

It was then arranged that the duchess was to become Gertrude’s banker, and that Vandeleur should make any necessary remittances of money through her. He paid his respects to the duke, and almost immediately after this last interview he set off with a heavy heart for England.

CHAPTER XXIII.

And at the last a path of little bread
I found, that greatly had not used be ;
For it forgrowne was with grasse and weed,
That well unneth a wighte might it se :
Thought I, this path some whider go'th pardé ;
And so I followed till it me brought
To right a pleasaunt herber, well ywrought.

The Flower and Leafè.

IN the mean time, not a trace was discovered of either of the fugitives by the emissaries despatched in search of them ; and days had grown to weeks, weeks were stretching into months, and Gertrude, in her splendid retirement, seemed gradually regaining as much peace and composure of mind as could have been expected for her under circumstances so peculiar. She still, indeed, shunned with nervous apprehension

meeting strangers of whatever rank or description ; but as she was not in any way compelled to do so, she suffered but little inconvenience from that feeling. Her duties about her imperial mistress from the first had been little more than nominal, and even the slight task of reading some French romance for an hour or two in the dressing-room, or giving her a short lesson in the pronunciation of English sentences, had been almost wholly discontinued since the return of the emperor ; for Gertrude, who knew not the jealous weakness of Elizabeth's temper, was as much surprised as delighted at the willing permission accorded her, to absent herself entirely during his visits to his royal consort ; while so lost was she herself to the common interests and curiosity of life, of which she once partook so largely, that while the rest of the world—at least the world by which she was surrounded—was exhausting itself in efforts to do honour to the return of their imperial hero, and rending the very skies with acclamations in his

praise, there was one being within his very palace-walls, and night after night sleeping under the same roof with him, who had never even by stealth obtained a sight of him, and of whose very existence he was as ignorant as if she had continued to dwell in her own England. Gertrude was in fact, as she herself expressed it, though outwardly a living body, a corpse within ; and although she ate a little, and slept a little, and moved about a little, it seemed really to be more the effect of habit than volition.

It soon appeared, however, as if even the outward tranquillity she had of late enjoyed was more than was deemed good for her at present ; for it had continued but a very short time, when it was again disturbed by the news of a change in the cabinet at home ; in consequence of which, the Duke of Castleton had requested to be recalled, and preparations were already in progress for his leaving Russia.

Gently and kindly as this intelligence was

communicated to Gertrude, it came upon her as a dreadful stroke. Her young and enthusiastic heart, at all times ready to fling some of its sweet fibres round anything fitted to receive them, had in its present desolation wholly abandoned itself to one so entirely worthy of it as the Duchess of Castleton ; and to part with her now, and she herself to remain behind in so *very foreign* a country, seemed but another of the many deaths she had already been doomed to die.

To her gentle mistress Gertrude felt a grateful and respectful attachment ; but their ranks were too far apart, and their circumstances too different, to admit of anything like friendship ; while the good ladies of the household, though they could not behold without pity, and some degree of interest, the deep but unobtrusive melancholy of the young and lovely Englishwoman, were too different from her in their habits, feelings, and ideas, for anything like confidence to exist between her and them, even if

her sorrows had not been of a nature that called for the closest reserve on her part.

At the same time, they, worthy souls ! contrived to satisfy their own curiosity respecting her, by filling up the outline of the rumour that had reached them of the affray between the count and Vandeleur ; and assured each other that it was Gertrude's husband who had been " barbarously murdered," and that when the English ambassador went to administer the knout to the offender with his own hands, he fell so desperately in love with the young widow, that the duchess was fain to hide her in the palace, where the duke would not dare to seek her, under the protection of their virtuous empress.

Perhaps this story answered the purpose of concealment as well as any that the parties themselves could have invented, though not exactly such as Gertrude might have selected, and obtained all the readier belief, because it had birth amongst themselves. Some — that is, the

few who were so fastidious as to require a show of consistency—added that she was a cousin of the duke's or the duchess's, (on this point the authorities were not agreed,) which was the reason of the great intimacy between her and the duchess: and, according as the fair *causalists* leaned to the weak, or the virtuous side of human nature, they asserted that Gertrude remained concealed from the duke by her own free will, or was flattered and bribed by the duchess into that prudent measure.

Little indeed, if any, of this gossip was ever obtruded on Gertrude's ear; but still it is not much to be wondered at, that when the news reached her of the intended departure of the Duchess of Castleton, her kind, her true, her refined and delicate friend and protectress, her first momentary impulse was to throw herself into her arms and exclaim,

“ Take me with you! at any risk to myself, take me with you, dearest duchess! I cannot remain here without you.”

“ Would you then yield yourself up, my love, to the trial ?”

“ Oh no, no ! Anything but that ; my senses would never hold : but to be hidden anywhere ——”

She paused, and looking into the duchess's face, saw so much embarrassment mingled with the gentlest pity and anxiety, as instantly recalled to her recollection how difficult and dangerous was the task she was about to impose upon her indulgent friend ; and her own generous feelings prompting her, not only to suffer everything herself rather than involve her in farther trouble, but even to spare her the pain of a refusal, she eagerly revoked the hasty wish she had uttered ; and only making the duchess repeat over and over again her promise of writing to her as frequently as was possible, she promised and determined to do all in her power to remain contentedly where she had found such timely refuge, until some turn in her fate should either enable or oblige her to leave it with propriety.

“ But I shall see you again, dear duchess, before you go ?” she repeated, still clinging to her, while tears, which she found it impossible to restrain, fell fast from her eyes.

“ You shall, my love, and frequently, I hope. Our movements are seldom as rapid as we ourselves propose. Dry your tears, my sweet Gertrude, and remember that your remaining here is only a matter of prudence after all, and for your own sake : but it *can* be revoked, and *shall* be,” she added soothingly and affectionately, all scruples of expediency and caution overcome by Gertrude’s air of gentle resignation, “ if you continue really to wish it.”

“ Thank you, thank you, my dear kind friend, for that word ; it is as judicious as it is kind ; for, to an ardent temperament like mine, the idea that you *can* escape when you please renders anything endurable.”

And Gertrude, true to her own generous—and, may we not call it heroic?—nature, resolved that, were it only for the sake of that

kind word, she would not abuse the duchess's indulgent consideration.

“ But, alas ! if it is true that many an evil thought and many a guilty wish are smothered in their very birth, who cannot also bear witness to many a high resolve and generous purpose that have been driven back upon the heart, or to which the opportunity for exercise has been denied ? And yet they who feel indignant or sorrowful when such has been the case, do perhaps but reap the bitter fruits of corrupted seed ; for it belongs not to degraded man to triumph in a lofty sentiment—there is no such thing for him. God made us perfect ; we have debased ourselves ; our loftiest aspirings are then but so much of our original nature, of the “ order of things,” unspoilt ; and to lament the loss of an opportunity for displaying them, is to lament that something has not gone wrong that we might rectify it ; and not very unlike the Irishman's wish, that his friend had been drowned that he might have had the pleasure of plunging into the

water to rescue him ! That all things should work together for the “universal good,” is all the benevolence that man should pretend to ; and to do his part humbly, meekly, and zealously, as one avoiding negligence in repairing the disorder that he or his fellow-men have wrought, should be the end of his endeavours. To look for a higher station, or a better sounding office, is indeed the mark of a fallen nature ; it is taking our standard from the nature to which we have fallen, instead of from that from which we had our noble origin. There are, however, two classes prone to this error, who are in their natures as opposite as light and darkness, as life and death : the one is the spiritually proud, who say to their neighbours, “Stand aside, I am holier than thou !”—the other is the young and the warm-hearted, who say to the afflicted, “Come to me and I will bind up thy wounds ; and would that they were ten thousand times more loathsome, that thou mightst see that whilst every one else turned away disgusted, I would

sit by thee and dress them still.” Now, while to the eye—ay, and to the heart of man, the latter class is the gentlest, the most amiable—perhaps the most loveable of any that exists, and the former perhaps the most revolting; whilst the latter is one that ameliorates our nature and softens its afflictions, while the former aggravates its asperities, and draws ill-will on religion itself; yet am I of opinion that they are equally the signs of a fallen nature. By equally, I mean that one shows it as clearly as the other, although so much of good be mingled with the one, while the other has not one redeeming trait, unless it plead its cold and selfish bigotry as such. I believe that the brave sentinel, who is placed to guard the outposts of the camp, would as soon think of claiming credit for not “doing his work negligently,” though his own life were to be the forfeit of that negligence, as a real Christian would, for all that he can do, in the short space of his existence, to assuage or ward off the evils we

have brought upon ourselves ; and that the one, when the battle is raging around him, might as rationally seek for some little separated spot where he could prove his own little prowess, while kingdoms are hanging on the result of the general *mêlée*, and expect credit for the same, with all its petty selfishness, as the Christian to seek for occasions to display extraordinary qualities of any kind ; with this difference only ; that glory being the soldier's meed, to seek it is his profession ; while humility being the passport to heaven, is the only unfailing sign of a regenerated nature. But whither have we wandered from poor Gertrude ? who, if she was not now the humblest of human beings, only yielded to a glad sensation in any generous resolve from the very warmth and energy of her young heart. Even that, however, was to be tempered ; and before Time effected that process with his cold wing, whose indiscriminating influence is generally extended over every feeling of our nature, she was destined to learn that

lesson, so difficult to the springing-time of life, —to be content to “do no wrong;” not as weak mortals use the words, but in the extended sense of the Scriptures.

Gertrude, we have already said, was from the first indulged in a degree of liberty about the palace and its princely domains, that was not permitted to the more formal members of the household; and, as no one felt it their duty to instruct her too rigidly in the ceremonial observances, or etiquette attending her situation, she frequently wandered about at hours, and into places, which by others were deemed sacred to the pleasure or the privacy of the imperial family.

There was one spot in particular, at a considerable distance from the house, where she delighted to pass whole hours together, both on account of the beauty of the place itself, and because, when there, she felt sheltered alike from the rays of the mid-day sun, and from the intrusion of any human being. It is true, there

was an ornamented walk, tended with the utmost care, leading to this seclusion; but this walk Gertrude always shunned, and contrived to arrive at her favourite haunt by one, which, overgrown with grass and brushwood, seemed to have been long forsaken for its newer neighbour. The spot itself was a sort of circular chamber, if it might be termed such, cleared out amidst dark and lofty trees, the close embowering branches of which, while they suffered the grass to grow rank, dense, and dark beneath their moisture, seldom permitted the cheerful rays of the summer's sun to penetrate; and while the gnarled trunk of one lofty lord of the surrounding forest had been bowed to form a rustic arm-chair, and the branches interlaced composed a canopy above, so admirable was the taste displayed in all, that the mind almost refused to believe that it was the work of art, and not the dwelling of some spirit of the woods.

There were, however, signs that could not

be mistaken of the ingenuity of man. As you sat within the fairy circle, the sound of dashing water fell continuously upon the ear ; and when you rose to seek the fairy fount, behold ! the splendid but artificial *jet d'eau*, tumbling in a thousand fanciful forms of silver spray, met your—shall I say ?— disappointed gaze.

Disappointment at least to Gertrude it certainly was, when, after having frequently enjoyed the lulling sound without sufficient curiosity to ascertain whence it proceeded, she at last ventured from her hiding-place to seek its source ; and perceived, what told in language that could not be mistaken, that others besides herself had loved her favourite spot. The unwelcome story was still more fully confirmed by the splendid bath-house and the odoriferous shrubs that she now discovered ; and, above all, because of the trouble and expense that attend the importing, and preservation of them, in a climate where the winter is so inimical to their bright feathers and musical voices, by the

assemblage of beautiful singing-birds that she saw fluttering and chirping about.

Her first timid feeling on this discovery was to fly ; her first exclamation, “this is no place for me :” but when returned to the sylvan vestibule, which was at a short distance from the gay scene we have just described, its gloom again seemed as congenial to her spirit as before ; she recollected too, that, frequently as she had already visited it, never yet had its solitude been disturbed save by herself ; and as the baths, though magnificent in design, and considerably advanced in execution, were evidently unfinished, and yet no workmen having ever been employed there since her arrival, she began to flatter herself that the purpose, whatever it had been, was now abandoned, probably through some caprice of satiated taste and luxury, and that all that now alarmed her would soon become as wild and deserted as the path by which she was in the habit of stealing thither.

Still the alarm she had experienced was suf-

ficient to prevent her return for some days ; and the next time she ventured to visit it, was one day after her light dinner, at which time she was in the habit of wandering about the grounds, whilst she knew the empress to be engaged at hers. She had never, indeed, ventured so far from the palace at that hour before ; but the evening was particularly tempting, and it was so much longer than usual since she had seen her favourite haunt, that she strayed on until she arrived there almost unconsciously.

She seated herself mechanically in her rustic chair, and sank into the melancholy musing which the place was at all times calculated to inspire, but which with Gertrude was now almost a second nature. Escaped from her cruel husband, and the fear of discovery having a good deal subsided, her musing had of late lost much of the gloom and bitterness that once accompanied it ; and she used even to look forward, with a sort of soothing anticipation, to the hour for repairing to a scene that seemed formed for

quiet, and repose of mind : but she had never visited it in the evening before ; and though, as we have said, that evening was one of particular loveliness and brightness, so deep and impenetrable was the shade of the trees around her, that night seemed suddenly to have fallen upon the earth. Whether it was owing to that circumstance altogether, or to the heavy dewy breath that foliage and herbs give out in the summer evenings, and which, all delicious as it is, is sometimes oppressive to those of weak spirits, or whether to some predisposing state of her nerves, she could not perhaps herself have told ; but so it was, that she had not been seated many minutes there before she felt a chill creeping over her spirits, and painful recollections began to throng too thickly upon her. The hour—and some undefinable, perhaps imaginary similitude in the atmosphere and scene, recalled to her recollection—first Beauton itself—then particular places there—associations connected with them — hours—days—evenings —

and finally—the fatal and the last. Irresistibly, and as if spell-bound, she dwelt upon its fearful memories with a vivid distinctness, that—alone and separated as she was from the world in that lone wilderness—affected her spirits with a gloom and an oppression, that, in all her variety of suffering, she had never before experienced. For the first time she suffered herself to doubt in what spirit her sainted brother looked down upon her now, and she felt that a frightful terror was taking hold upon her. Presently her limbs grew cold, and her heart seemed to cease its pulsations. To rise and fly was her first impulse ; but she felt, what all, in similar nervous paroxysms, I suppose, have felt ; namely, that to make the effort would deprive her of the little presence of mind that remained, and that, if her feet performed their office at all, it must be to bear her shrieking to the palace. Still, her terror was every moment augmenting ; and she was now shuddering, as persons sometimes do before they faint.

In her extremity she had recourse, as usual, to prayer. She sank down upon her knees with as little movement as was possible, feeling that the very rustling of her clothes would jar upon her excited nerves; and desperately burying her face in her hands, in the hope that, by shutting out the objects by which she was surrounded, she could shut out their effects, she endeavoured to form a prayer to be relieved from the gloom that had fallen upon her spirit. The most perfect stillness was around, and even the little birds had betaken themselves to the aviaries and various devices that were contrived to allure them to that spot. Gertrude was compelled to restrain even her own palpitating breathing, so fearful did it sound in that stillness.

But hark! even while yet her short aspiration is unfinished, she hears a rustle—a step—it is close beside her—in a frenzy of terror she looks up—and, standing about a yard distant

from her, she sees a gentleman, and a stranger. A moment before, the sight might have been welcome as that of an angel ; but now, her nervous excitement had gained too much power over her strength,—he appeared too suddenly before her,—and no sooner did she behold him than, uttering a low and smothered shriek, she fell fainting at his feet.

The gentleman sprang to her assistance, and caught her in his arms as she fell ; and fearful as was her alarm, it did not exceed in intensity the astonishment that took possession of him, when he beheld the exquisitely beautiful young creature, whom the sight of him (for in no other way could he account for it) had nearly, if not entirely, deprived of life. He saw at once that she was an English woman, which did not tend to solve the mystery ; and knew enough of our customs to be aware that she wore a widow's dress. So young, so beautiful, so refined and distinguished-looking, even in her insensible

state, who could she be? or what had brought her to wander in the grounds of the imperial residence, alone and at such an hour?

But although these questions passed rapidly through his mind, he did not pause to give them utterance even in exclamations; but, raising Gertrude in his arms, he carried her to where the waters were playing, and, suffering some sprinkles to fall upon her face, he chafed her hands, loosened the strings of her bonnet, and, not being very expert at the employment, pulled off her widow's cap at the same time, by which means the comb which supported her fine hair fell out; and when, after a few moments, she opened her eyes, she found herself reclining against the breast of a gentleman whom she had never beheld before, and whose arms, breast, and shoulder were all shaded over with her flowing tresses. So complete had been her nervous exhaustion, that it was some minutes before she could recover herself sufficiently to rise from his encircling arms, or even summon

recollection sufficient to think where she was or what had befallen her.

The moment, however, that she was able to make the effort, though still trembling, shocked, and bewildered at all that had passed, she eagerly exclaimed,

“ Pray tell me, for God’s sake, who you are, and how you came so suddenly before me? Have I been long ill?”

The gentleman smiled gently.

“ Compose yourself,” he said, “ I am no bandit. If you recollect, the grass around where you sat is particularly soft: when I was near enough to distinguish a lady in the attitude of prayer, my step could not reach your ear; and my curiosity was so much excited by the sight, in such a place, at such an hour, that I will not deny that I might have stepped more cautiously forwards then, partly indeed fearful of disturbing your devotions.”

“ But who are you?” repeated Gertrude, whose bewilderment and agitation had no

yet sufficiently subsided to allow her to think of conventional etiquette. “ Who are you ? Are you any one who can accompany me back to the palace ? for I am too ill and too nervous to attempt to go alone ! ”

“ To the palace ! ” the gentleman repeated in increasing astonishment ; and forgetting Gertrude’s curiosity in his own, he exclaimed in his turn, “ Who then are you ? Can it be that you are —— ? ” He paused.

“ *Who ?* ” screamed poor Gertrude, with a look of such sudden dismay as must at once have betrayed her to any one interested in her apprehension.

Happily, the gentleman had never even heard of the circumstances attending her, and therefore merely gazing on her in fresh astonishment, he answered, “ Nay, don’t be alarmed ; it is *I* who have cause to fear to offend, if I venture to ask if the empress is so happy as to number you in her household ? ”

This question, together with the gentlemanly

address and noble air of the handsome stranger, might have served fully to reassure any one whose nerves were in better order, or whose imagination was more under the control of their judgment, than those of Gertrude were at that moment. But, as in her, the fear of being discovered and dragged before the world on the frightful charge that hung over her, had only subsided in her utter seclusion, the sight of a stranger was at any moment sufficient to recall it; and now, in the lone evening, far from the palace, far from aid of any kind, Vandeleur in England, the duchess preparing to leave Russia—all this rushed upon her mind at once, and completely deprived her of all sense save of instant apprehension. She suddenly, from the very force of terror, recovered strength sufficient to spring up from the green knoll on which she had hitherto been sitting, and stood before her astonished companion a monument of silent but gasping terror.

The gentleman, who had also till then re-

mained seated beside her, now sprang up likewise, confounded by her sudden and violent emotion, and they stood confronting each other in silence for an instant, each under the influence of their own sensations. The gentleman, however, perceiving that her terror seemed every moment increasing, and utterly unconscious of the cause, advanced towards her in the hope of soothing or removing it ; but he was deterred from his purpose by her wildly clasping her hands together, and with a countenance of the most piteous entreaty repeating, “ Oh, spare me ! for God’s sake, spare me ! and if you would not see me die at your feet, tell me who or what you are, and what you want with me ? ”

“ I beseech of you, lady, to compose yourself,” he replied in a low and soothing voice ; and at the same time moving a little nearer to her, as if feeling that that tone must reassure her, “ compose yourself, and believe that I am at a loss to conceive how I can have terrified you thus, chance only having brought me

to your presence : but if nothing but my name will convince you that I am no midnight murderer, you shall not ask it again ;” and taking her hand between both his, with a look and manner so gentle, and even tender, that she could not reject it, he bent his head, and said in a kind of whisper, “ I am—ALEXANDER.”

“ Alexander ! good heavens ! not the emperor ?” she hurriedly exclaimed, gazing wildly on him, while conviction followed fast upon the words as she herself repeated them ; and she felt at once that all that had seemed strange, unusual, and almost oppressive to her in the condescending familiarity of his manner, was thus happily and graciously accounted for.

“ Yes, the emperor of all the Russias !” he replied, smiling at her vehement and inartificial exclamation, “ but *your* most devoted servant.”

Gertrude instantly felt the necessity of endeavouring to collect her senses from the abandonment in which she had hitherto rather suf-

ferred them to indulge, and would have bent her knee ; but the emperor, gracefully restraining her, begged of her once more to satisfy his curiosity, as far as might not be disagreeable to her. The entreaty was a painful one, for she was not an adept in falsehood, or even in what is considered allowable disguise. She hesitated and stammered ; and at last, bursting into tears, said she was a very unhappy creature, who had met with much and trying misfortunes, and that the Duchess of Castleton had made interest with the empress, to take her into her service.

“ How long ago ? and how is it that I have never had the happiness of seeing you before ? ”

Gertrude informed him.

“ Well, now that Fortune has favoured me more than you or the empress were disposed to do, I hope you will allow me to profit by my chance, and to assist her in offering you all the consolation in our power. In the mean time,

now that you see I am no wolf in human form, or whatever other monster your fancy conjured up, will you resume your seat until you are more perfectly recovered?" and he took her hand to replace her on that from which she had so hastily risen; but as she was already sufficiently recovered to attempt to walk, and felt no desire whatever to prolong the embarrassing interview, she expressed anxiety not to trespass longer upon his majesty, adding with a deep blush, as she glanced at her bonnet, which still lay on the grass, though she had hastily folded up her hair again in her cap, "that she feared she had already put his kindness and good-nature to too severe a test; but she was so frightened!"

"But what frightened you, my fair mysterious? My vanity is not relieved on that subject yet, I assure you. I may have frightened men in my time, but I never knew I was so hideous as to cause women to faint."

Gertrude could not help smiling at this man-

ner of accounting for her illness, especially as she now had had leisure and composure enough to notice the very handsome, though (when not softened, as at present) somewhat stern features of Alexander, whose figure also was so noble as to cause him to be considered one of the finest men in his own vast dominions.

“ It did not require ugliness to frighten me at that moment, as I need not tell your majesty,” she said, with a smile and a blush of such engaging simplicity that it seemed almost playful, and Alexander felt it to be the sweetest compliment he had ever received ; “ but my mind was oppressed and shaken at the moment with such fearful recollections, that an angel would have probably met the same reception from me.”

“ That I could have still less conceived,” said Alexander, “ as we are seldom scared at our own images ; but why do you fasten on your bonnet ? the evening is so lovely ! but, per-

haps, I have intruded upon you, and still annoy you by my presence ?”

“ Oh, no !” she exclaimed hastily, a slight return of vague alarm flashing over her as she thought of being left alone again in that secluded, gloomy, though most lovely little wilderness of taste. “ Oh, no ; indeed I do not wish to remain longer, evening is rapidly advancing !”

“ But you said you were afraid to return alone,” said the emperor smiling ; “ and as I have not yet enjoyed the ramble I came out for, or seen what progress they have made during my absence in my new baths here, if you will not accompany me, either you must return alone, at the mercy of all envious sprites, or I must give up my purposed pleasure. Which is to be ?”

“ Surely not the latter,” replied Gertrude ; “ every moment I am getting better ; and now I shall respectfully and gratefully take permission

to leave your majesty to pursue your walk;" and curtseying low, she was turning to depart, when Alexander, who was infinitely struck with her beauty, grace, and *naïveté*, exclaimed,

"Nay then, since *you* are so perverse, *I* must yield; and, after all, it is but resigning a lesser for a greater pleasure, though, miser-like, I wished to have grasped both; but come, you must reward me by letting me be of some use. You must lean upon my arm, as you are not yet strong enough to walk alone."

Gertrude would have excused herself from this, but the emperor would not be denied; and they proceeded towards the palace by the new path, which Gertrude had hitherto carefully avoided.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Have I with all my full affections
Still met the king? loved him next Heaven? obeyed him
Been, out of fondness, superstitious to him?
Almost forgot my prayers, to content him?
And am I thus rewarded?
Bring me a constant woman to her husband,
One that ne'er dream'd a joy beyond his pleasure;
And to that woman, when she has done most,
Yet will I add an honour,—a great patience.

Henry VIII.

IN their walk homewards the emperor did not again revert to his curiosity as to who Gertrude could be, or under what circumstances she had become an inmate of the imperial palace. There evidently was some mystery connected with it which he could not guess at, and which she was unwilling to explain; but he satisfied

himself for the present with a determination to learn all from Elizabeth herself.

In the mean time he endeavoured to draw Gertrude into conversation on various topics; and she, deeply sensible of his kindness and condescension throughout the whole adventure, felt it incumbent on her, whilst in his company, to struggle against her usual taciturnity and abstraction. The very anxiety not to appear ungrateful, lent to her manner a softness, and an appearance of interest in all he said, which, satiated as he might well have been by the adulations of millions upon millions, came to his feelings with a gracious freshness that he felt to be delicious. There was not, indeed, in her conversation either the brilliancy of wit, or the display of erudition, nor yet the specious seeming which constant association with polished society can give to airy nothings: but there was instead, much native intelligence, some judicious cultivation, though much of wild luxuriance; and there broke out,

every now and then, little light emanations, which showed a naturally vivid and lively mind ; while over all was diffused a degree of native elegance, refinement, and simplicity, which the emperor seldom had seen so happily blended together, and which he was fully capable of appreciating. He became every moment more and more pleased and interested in his young companion, and began to exert himself to please in his turn. He spoke of his visit to England, and gave her several amusing and interesting anecdotes respecting it ; he spoke of the preceding war, and Gertrude listened as attentively as if she had expected that some of his anecdotes were to particularize Vandeleur himself : but Alexander guessed not this motive for her willing attention ; and, gay and good-humoured, he proceeded from subject to subject, until Gertrude was absolutely, and probably for the first time since the fatal event occurred, cheated into forgetfulness of her misfortunes.

Mutually pleased, they were proceeding at

a slow and protracted pace, when, as they made an abrupt turn from one shaded path into another more open one, which led directly to one of the private entrances through the empress's favourite pleasure-gardens, they met Elizabeth herself, with one or two of her ladies, sauntering in the same direction, tempted out by the beauty of the evening. Words cannot express the amazement she experienced at encountering her broken-hearted and concealed protégée familiarly leaning upon the arm of the emperor, and listening with so much pleased attention to his animated conversation, that it was some minutes before either the speaker or the listener became aware that they were not alone.

No sooner, however, did Gertrude look up, and perceive Elizabeth within a few paces of her, than she was struck with the look of cold, and evidently displeased surprise, which had taken possession of her countenance; and in an instant struck back into all the miseries of her own situation, she became so overwhelmed

with the sudden transition from her momentary enjoyment, that the animated and open explanation, which a moment before she should have been able to have given of her late adventure, died upon her lips, and she stood in confused silence, trusting that the emperor would himself explain it; but he too, whether he had also perceived the expression of Elizabeth's countenance, or whether he did not choose to seem as if he thought any explanation could be deemed necessary for an intimacy which he perhaps wished should appear as a matter of course,—whatever the reason might have been,—he remained perfectly silent, and the empress herself was the first to speak.

“We sought your majesty,” she said, “hearing you had wandered hitherwards alone, to offer you our company, not being aware that you were already provided with a companion.”

“My having found a companion,” Alexander gaily answered, “was more the effect of good fortune than good intention on my part; and

for this lady, as she will not I fear acknowledge the good luck, and is too honest to claim the good intention, I believe she must have recourse to simple chance and her own good taste, which led her to the prettiest spot in all these grounds, and where I found her in a death-struggle with the guardian spirits of the place, who were envious at seeing it possessed by any one fairer than themselves. I, however, like a true knight, stept in to the rescue, and have now the pleasure of restoring her safe into your majesty's hands ;” and, so saying, he yielded to the attempt of Gertrude to withdraw her arm from his, which he had hitherto resisted.

Elizabeth, though still in perplexity and astonishment at the sudden intimacy, aware as she was that the parties had never met before, felt she had no excuse for evincing farther displeasure, and merely observing, “ Your majesty has become quite poetic in your compliments since your late visits to Paris,”

accepted the arm which Alexander now offered her.

Gertrude in the mean time was seized upon by the ladies who had accompanied the empress, and obliged to give the most minute account of the whole occurrence: and, though already properly aware of the kindness and condescension of the emperor, it was only from their comments that she learned the full extent of how highly she had been favoured, and one or two hints, thrown out perhaps maliciously, of the weakness attributed to the empress, soon succeeded in dispelling anything that remained of satisfaction in her mind from the interview.

She felt indeed so terrified and disgusted at the new ideas suggested to her, and so dejected at the fate that seemed to pursue her on all sides, turn where she might, that she pleaded indisposition, and did not leave her room for the two or three succeeding days.

In the mean time the emperor returned to St.

Petersburgh ; and, when Gertrude reappeared, Elizabeth's manner towards her had resumed all its usual kindness and gentleness. The empress was indeed intrinsically amiable ; and if she suffered from a failing to which so many who have warm affections have been victims, it was perhaps more a subject of pity than of blame, especially as, when at its most painful crisis, it led in her gentle breast to no step more violent or undignified than the withdrawing of herself from the court of her husband for some time, and retiring to that of her royal father.

Gertrude often longed extremely to ask whether the emperor had made any inquiries concerning her, and how far Elizabeth had thought fit to confide in him : it could not but be deeply interesting to her to know ; yet was there some feeling, inspired probably by the hints of the two gossiping ladies, that always prevented her from naming the emperor and herself together, especially as she could not but observe that Elizabeth

never again alluded to that evening's adventure, or made a further comment upon the subject.

Several days passed over before Gertrude happened by any accident to see the emperor again ; and it might have been a fortnight after the first adventure, that as she sat one evening at the open window of an apartment on the ground-floor, which she particularly enjoyed because of its being at the least ornamented and least frequented part of the palace, and opened on a pretty but neglected little flower-garden, she was startled and surprised to see the emperor himself enter the little enclosure, closing behind him its fanciful gate.

Her first movement was to draw her head back from the window ; and, as she hoped he had not perceived her, she softly rose and was about to steal from the apartment : before she reached the door, however, Alexander was already at the window, and looking in, requested her to return ; she had no excuse for refusing to obey him, and he sprang into the room from where

he stood, and, taking her hand, led her to a seat, and inquired in the kindest and most respectful manner after her health; expressing regret at her recent indisposition, of which he had been informed.

“ I fear you caught cold on that evening when I had first the pleasure of meeting you,” he said, and fixed his eyes on her with a look of such penetration as brought a blush into her cheek; it seemed to her to ask so plainly whether her indisposition were real, or only assumed in compliance with a hint from the empress.

She hastened to disabuse him of that surmise, without betraying her consciousness of it, and mentioned, as the probable cause of her illness, the unhappy state of her mind, which every trifle now painfully agitated.

The emperor regarded her with compassion.

“ I am aware of your sad story,” he said in a low, solemn, and very feeling tone. “ Why do

you start so fearfully, and become pale? Do you think me capable of injuring you? For God's sake, compose yourself; you are terrified, you are going to faint again: let me support you."

But she was not going to faint; and, gently rejecting his support, she leaned her head upon her hand, and large tears fell from her eyes.

Alexander was affected; he was good-natured and kind-hearted on any sudden occasion, and taking the handkerchief which lay upon her lap, he himself, ere she could prevent it, applied it to her eyes. Her evil star was still in the ascendant; at that very moment while Alexander was with one hand drying the tears from her cheeks, and with the other gently holding down hers, which would have prevented him, the Empress Elizabeth, guided thither doubtless by some presentiment in her own breast, suddenly but softly opened the door of the apartment. She stood for one moment as

if petrified at the sight she beheld ; then instantly closing it, without uttering a word, retired.

Words could not do justice to the horror that instantly took possession of Gertrude ; all that the ladies of the court had hinted to her, all that she had herself felt by woman's sympathy of what Elizabeth's feelings must be, rushed upon her mind at once, and, leaning back in her chair, she uttered the words " I am lost !"

Alexander, who himself was for a moment confounded, not from any consciousness of guilt, for he had not the slightest reason for such consciousness, but merely from his knowledge of the foible of the empress, and the *contretems* of her opening the door at that moment, now felt the necessity of concealing such feelings from his companion, and, wishing to soothe her, was about to take her hand again, when, starting from him and from her chair, she fled from the room before he had the power to prevent her, and, rushing along the suite of apartments

through which she knew the empress must have passed, she never paused until she overtook her, and, forgetting all fortuitous distinctions of rank and etiquette in the alarm of the moment, seized her by the dress, and gasped a moment to recover her breath.

The empress, utterly unused to such a mode of address, screamed with alarm ; and, had she not purposely come on her jealous quest by a way where she was not likely to meet any of her attendants, the uproar might have been unpleasant. As it was, Gertrude, not however relinquishing her hold, lest the empress should escape her, fell upon her knees ; and, her whole soul speaking in her eyes and countenance, exclaimed,

“ You *must* hear me, empress ! I know what mischief has often ensued for want of a timely explanation ; this must plead my apology. I know what you think of me, and how you feel to me at this moment : but as I hope to see heaven ; as I hope, O, Empress ! to see

him whom I sent there before his time ; you wrong me cruelly, you wrong yourself, you wrong the emperor. It has all been accidental, unavoidable, however odd it may have appeared to you. I always wished to have explained to you how the first meeting took place ; but you never mentioned the subject to me, and I was ashamed to introduce it." She stopped, and gazed eagerly and anxiously in the empress's face.

Elizabeth, the infirmity of whose temper could not overcome her kind and candid disposition, perceived in one moment the force of truth in what Gertrude asserted, as far at least as it concerned herself. Of the emperor's feelings she still believed, with that fatal determination that ever clings to the jealous, that she herself was the best judge.

She raised Gertrude kindly from the posture she had in her energetic appeal assumed ; and hesitating for a moment how to reply to her, between her sense of queenly dignity and her

feelings as a gentle and obliged woman, she gave way to the latter, and, gracefully laying her hand upon Gertrude's head, she said, " I believe you, and I thank you. You have seen my weakness, you must hear my apology ;" and taking her arm, she led her into an apartment, the door of which they had already reached.

Gertrude trembling excessively, both from the alarm she had experienced, and from witnessing the emotion of the empress, stood before her in very unpleasant anticipation of what was to follow ; for, young as she was, she knew it was ever accounted a dangerous distinction to be the repository of the secrets of princes ; moreover, she felt sorry to see the empress, whom she loved and respected, stoop to excuse herself by criminating her husband, where the burden of blame to be borne must be so disproportioned. In this spirit she would have remonstrated ; but Elizabeth was too eager to hear her, and proceeded to pour into her unwilling ears a little history of fears and feelings that at least tended

as much to show her own predisposition to be alarmed, as any faults on the part of her husband.

Gertrude, forgetful for the moment of her own precarious position, or in her artlessness imagining that any unpleasant suspicion was for ever removed because the empress was satisfied for the moment, felt unaffected sorrow to find how one unhappy failing of temper, not even amounting to a moral wrong, may have the power to blight the happiness of two persons apparently in possession of every thing that the heart of man or woman could desire. Elizabeth perceived her melancholy dejection, and, attributing it to sympathy in her own sorrows, felt more pleased and satisfied with her than ever; and now believing that she really had wronged even the emperor by her momentary suspicions, she generously resolved to remove the impression it might have left upon his mind, by voluntarily bringing Gertrude more into his society, and

even affording him opportunities of conversing with her.

With a mind, the general constitution of which was unimpaired, and naturally healthy and vigorous, though some accidental blemish may for a moment have disfigured it, such a course might have been judicious and successful ; but as there is no point that puts the physician's skill to a nicer test than to pronounce when an operation may be salutary, or the contrary, so does it require a thorough knowledge of oneself, or others, to ascertain beforehand, what degree of temptation or provocation we may brave or bear.

Accordingly, although the plan resorted to by Elizabeth might in many cases have succeeded in restoring health and vigour to the mind ; to hers, amiable but facile, gentle but enfeebled by long habits of indulgence in tender sorrows, whether real or imaginary, the trial was too severe. She struggled carefully as long as it

might be possible to conceal from Gertrude the uneasiness she suffered ; but the wound only festered the more bitterly within. While the latter, from the perfect propriety and even respectful kindness of the emperor's conduct towards her, together with Elizabeth's seeming confidence, which she innocently believed to be sincere, lost all fears of future annoyance, and perhaps partly unconsciously, but also as hoping by that means more fully to reassure the empress, laid aside all her assumed reserve and much of her depression when enjoying his agreeable society. One more skilled in human nature would have probably seen at once through the disguise the unfortunate empress imposed upon her own feelings ; but, though Gertrude's sympathy was ever remarkably acute, she was herself so frank, so ingenuous, so incapable of all "seeming," that she had not yet learned to trust her own perceptions against the assertions of others ; and to Elizabeth's particular failing, it so happened, that she was by nature a perfect

stranger, never having for one moment experienced it in the slightest degree. Had it been otherwise, she had perhaps been more constantly on her guard, and might not have found necessary the serious measure she finally adopted to repair her error when she discovered it.

CHAPTER XXV.

Fate is behind the scenes : she holds the strings
That rule the motions of this shifting show ;
Fear, love, and hate, counsel and accident,
These hath she gathered in a hidden coil,
No man thereof may spy the intricate ends.
So we are moved to aims we deem not of.

The Lord of Malfy.

It was a very few days before that on which the Duke and Duchess of Castleton were to leave St. Petersburg on their return to England, that late one evening a note was handed to the duchess by one of her attendants, who informed her that it was given to him by a poor English woman who waited for an answer. The duchess ran her eye hastily over the contents, and, unable to suppress an exclamation of surprise, desired

that the woman should be shown to her dressing-room.

“ My dear love,” said the duke, who was present at the time, “ why give yourself the trouble of seeing every one who chooses to apply to you for charity ? Can you not order something to be given to her ? ”

“ I must see this person,” said the duchess. “ I believe it is a poor creature who wants our protection to England.”

“ But you know we are not going direct to England. You know we have determined on making a little tour through Switzerland and Italy.”

“ Still we may be able to afford her some assistance in leaving this country, and I cannot refuse to see her.”

The duke yawned and was silent, accustomed to yield without much remonstrance or inquiry to his wife’s active offices of benevolence, to which, to do him justice, he seldom objected to contribute as far as any sum of money

which she in her prudence ever requested from him.

The duchess hurried to her dressing-room ; and there awaiting her, wrapped in a cloak such as the peasant women of Russia wear, she found Gertrude. She did not perhaps feel as much alarm, but certainly not less surprise, than when, on a former occasion the same person presented herself before her an utter stranger.

“ In the name of Heaven, Gertrude, what has happened to you ? How are you from the palace in this disguise ? Has anything befallen the empress ? ”

“ You must sit down, my dearest duchess, and hear me circumstantially ; and then I trust, even if you think I have acted hastily, you will at least not call it imprudently.”

The duchess sat down at her request, though very much doubting in her own mind, as people generally do when startled, that she should wholly acquit her of imprudence ; but, as she forbore to express this doubt, Gertrude pro-

ceeded to inform her of what she had hitherto suppressed from respect to her august mistress, viz. the first symptoms she perceived of her jealousy, how it was repeated, then abjured, and finally renewed in a manner which neither Gertrude's feelings nor judgment could allow her to endure any longer. It took place the very morning of that day. It appeared that, for some little time past, the emperor, encouraged by Gertrude's innocent and confiding manner, had gradually become more and more kind, and even tender, in his attentions to her ; and had made her several elegant little presents, which, as she always carried them on the instant to the empress for her approval, she felt no necessity of ungraciously declining, although perfectly convinced in her own mind that to her they must ever be utterly valueless, either intrinsically or even as tokens of his regard. He had once or twice joined her too in her rambles through the demesnes ; but, as latterly she had never been tempted to wander far, it had hitherto happened

that he was never able to contrive to follow her until she was near the house on her return, and then any excuse served her to leave him almost instantly : indeed, he himself, though evidently disappointed, did not on these occasions attempt to detain her, but, on the contrary, seemed to approve of her prudence ; for though, in his admiration, and even increasing interest in the beautiful and unfortunate young stranger so curiously thrown upon his protection, there was as yet nothing to alarm his feelings or his conscience, yet, fully aware of the sensitive nature of his empress's affection, he was desirous to avoid awakening her alarm in the slightest degree. As, however, this wish was in the present instance founded on no better principle than to avoid any annoyance to himself or Gertrude, it was not likely to influence him beyond what the fear of detection might impose ; and accordingly, on the first opportunity that presented itself for indulging in Gertrude's

society unmolested, he hastened to avail himself of it.

The imperial family of Russia at all times observed early hours, particularly early rising ; and although the long day is a blessing only for the happy, and a necessity only for the busy, and although poor Gertrude now belonged to neither of these two classes, and found her hours of sleep the most endurable of her existence, still when the world,—and who may call their own little circle the world, if not the members of a royal court?—when the world was astir about her, she could not be the only one to indulge in habits of indolence. Besides, she was always passionately fond of the fresh open air. Born and nurtured in a lovely country, far remote from the loaded atmosphere of a city, her pure and healthful constitution enjoyed—even, as it were, palpably enjoyed—the refreshing supplies of life that come prepared for our use from the vegetable world. The summers in Russia are love-

ly ; and now that the noon of summer had passed by, nothing could be more delightful than its gentle decline ; and when, one morning, Gertrude, happening to waken much earlier than usual, rose and looked out upon the luxuriant scene that spread far as her eye could reach, steeped in the delicious dew of early morning, and breathing of all the accumulated sweets that taste and fancy had collected there, she felt her very soul expand within her bosom with every breath she inhaled ; and, hastily performing her toilette, she stole from the house, determined, under favour of the early hour, to indulge herself in a longer ramble than of late she had attempted.

I dare say there is no one who has not remarked, though perhaps few can explain why it is so, that if one member of a family happens to waken earlier than usual, some other is likely to do so too : it may be owing perhaps to some atmospheric influence, or it may be caused by some occurrence of the preceding day, which, acting

alike on the nerves of each, was yet by each disregarded or forgotten. I know not whether it was owing to either of these *recherchées* causes, or whether to simple chance, that, upon the same morning on which Gertrude sprang from her couch with something like her former joyous waking, before her poor mind had time to recall the fearful reality of her fate, Alexander also rose before his usual hour; and although Gertrude had wandered far away, even to the beautiful spot where she had first beheld him, before he left his dressing-room, as she lingered there enjoying some of the calmest if not happiest sensations she now had felt for many, many months, he, attracted first by her window open at so early an hour, and then tracing her small foot-prints in the dewy grass, was at her side before she even thought of returning.

She started at seeing him so early; and blushed, she could scarcely have told why, at his finding her again in the place that was known to be particularly his favourite resort when he

wandered through the grounds, and which he had in a manner consecrated to himself by causing baths to be erected there for his own use. He smiled, with a gratified feeling, on her embarrassment, and softly whispered,

“ Is it the fascination of *terror* that attracts you here, where you suffered so much alarm from the sudden appearance of a monster ?”

“ No, sire : it is simply admiration of a place laid out and embellished with so much taste, together with thoughtless carelessness whither I bent my steps this lovely morning ; and indeed I feel I should apologise for intruding on the haunt that almost all others hold sacred to your majesty.”

“ Come, Gertrude, this is affectation : you are well aware that I consider this retreat, that I consider our palace, honoured and embellished by your presence. I wish to Heaven you would treat me more as a friend ; I wish you would open your heart to me, and converse freely upon your sorrows ; I am convinced it would relieve you to do so.”

“ It is impossible, sire, quite impossible,” she said, turning away her head, and shrinking, as she always did, from that subject.

“ And why impossible ? why do you turn away ? do you never converse with the empress about it all ? I am sure I take as much interest in you as she does.”

“ Never, I never do ; I am unequal to speak on the subject, though it is never for a moment absent from my thoughts ; and this lovely morning is the first time that I have thought upon it with anything short of despair. Do not, pray, force open the floodgates of my grief just now ;” and she smiled a smile of such gentle pleading, as if enamoured of one moment of peace, that Alexander felt it to his soul, and, seizing her hand and kissing it, he exclaimed,

“ I will not. I would sooner die than give you pain ; let me be your companion for half-an-hour, and we shall discourse on everything that may amuse your mind.”

Gertrude felt embarrassed and distressed :

she had no reason to assign for refusing this request of the emperor ; and yet some instinct, that is, some latent spark of judgment not yet quite smothered by our superadded and foreign habits, and which we are so apt to term *presentiment*, made her feel that there was imprudence, if not danger, in yielding to his request. She faltered and hesitated.

“ Have you any objection ? ” he asked emphatically, and with more of haughtiness than he was wont to assume towards her.

“ Objection, sire ! no ; certainly none to your society. How could it be ? ”

“ What is the matter then ? Is it—shall I guess ? ” and bending his head close to her he pronounced the words—“ the empress ? ”

Had he fired a pistol at Gertrude’s ear she could scarcely have felt more astounded, more bewildered, than by that low though emphatic whisper. She felt as if suddenly a gigantic barrier of propriety and reserve between her and the emperor had been demolished, and that

“the decent drapery of life had been rudely torn aside.”

For a moment he stood as if enjoying her confusion ; then, recalling his better nature, he said more gaily,

“Come, come, Gertrude ; this is idle trifling between you and me. I would not say, I would not feel, anything disrespectful of the empress ; but you have lived too long with us not to know poor Elizabeth’s failing, with how little cause I am sure you might yourself avouch, from the specimen you had of it one day before ; but come, she is not thinking of waking yet, and as I flatter myself you not only have not, but never shall have, reason to regret the acquaintance commenced between us on this spot, I trust you will not represent the empress as less amiable than I know her to be, by making me suppose she would deprive me of the society of every agreeable woman.”

“But, sire, without drawing on such feelings as you attribute to the empress, there

is a difference of rank and station to be observed."

"And who is to judge of the propriety of those distinctions? and when they are to be observed, and when dispensed with? Who creates and dissolves them at pleasure? the empress? you? or *me*? Come, once more come, Gertrude; do not put me out of humour with myself and everybody else this charming morning, which I came out to enjoy in a frame of mind very different;" and, so saying, he drew her arm within his; and although she did not dare to contradict him farther, yet there was a restraint and coldness diffused over her whole air and conversation, of which though Alexander could not exactly complain, he felt it to be unpleasant, and before long, without any request from her to that effect, he turned to retrace his steps to the palace; and, as they approached it, they had gradually sunk into total silence, and the emperor had yawned more than once.

To say that Gertrude did not observe this

change, would be to say that she had not observed his former pleasure in her company ; and not to say that she even saw in it what had been a subject of regret to many — to herself in other circumstances, were to say she had not the feelings and sympathies of woman : but that she not only did not lament it now, but even felt a stern and healthful satisfaction in it, even while tears rose to her eyes, is but as true as it is just to her prudence, and affectionate feeling towards the empress : and innocently satisfied with herself, and triumphant in her excellent principles, she waited on her royal mistress that morning in higher spirits than she had ever experienced since the happy days of her girlhood. But “ her doom had gone forth ;” light spirits it seemed were never again to be her portion, and the slightest approach to them was sure to be followed by tenfold depression.

On entering the apartment of the empress, she perceived her brow was cloudy, and that her manner was cold and restrained. Still, as

Gertrude never felt more confident that she herself could in no way have caused this appearance, and even feeling that the change in Alexander's manner would, dared she to have hinted at it, have delighted the empress, the very consciousness of this enabled her for some time to rally and bear up against the empress's increasing depression.

She even ventured to say, "The emperor has been already walking this morning, madam." No answer was vouchsafed ; but the cloud grew deeper and darker, and a slight colour tinged the pale cheek. Then suddenly a thought, a painful thought, flashed across Gertrude's mind, and she determinately continued,

"I met his majesty in his ramble ; or, rather, he found me, as I had gone out first."

"A lucky chance !" the empress said in a tone that could not be mistaken.

Gertrude paused a moment ; then, with a beating heart, and in a gentle and mournful tone, asked the simple question, "How lucky, madam ?"

The empress cast a hasty, angry, and disdainful glance on her, and remained silent.

Gertrude stood in misery beside her, but it was misery that ought not to be endured.

“ You seem displeased with me, madam. Did I wrong in walking out this morning ? God knows how little I expected, how little I intended, to intrude upon the emperor.”

“ Gertrude, you are a hypocrite.”

“ I am not, dearest madam,” (bursting into an agony of tears,) “ but I am accursed of God and man ;” and wringing her hands she continued, “ there is a spell, a curse upon me, that I blight every one I wish to serve. Oh, madam, madam, pity and hear me : I have shunned my walks of late ; I have done everything to avoid seeing the emperor, except in your presence. I got up this morning at an hour when no one could have supposed him stirring ; and when ill-luck brought him upon me, I made myself so purposely disagreeable to him that I think he will never care to see me again.”

The empress hastily looked round in amazement at her. She was once more staggered in her suspicions of her falsity by this ingenuous and artless speech, which seemed to her jaundiced mind unconsciously to admit the emperor's evil designs, while it cleared her of participation in them.

“Then you mean to say, Gertrude, that you did not meet the emperor by appointment this morning?”

Gertrude held up her hands and raised her eyes in astonishment and despair.

“So help me Heaven! I did not, madam; but, on the contrary, chose the hour when I thought it impossible. Oh, dearest madam!” she exclaimed, suddenly altering her tone, and throwing herself on her knees before the empress, “once more rouse yourself from this fatal imagination. Do justice to yourself, to the emperor, and to me. You wrong us all, indeed you do, by these groundless alarms.”

“ Groundless ! alas ! alas ! ” exclaimed Elizabeth, her fine eyes filling with tears ; “ no, Gertrude. Once more I believe in your innocence as yet ; but for the emperor, believe me I know the world better than you do.”

“ To know the world, dearest, honoured madam, is not to know every individual and every circumstance in the world ; and some particular fact may fall under the knowledge of a child, while it is concealed from the oldest or the wisest ; and, believe me, the emperor is as incapable of wronging you as I am.”

“ Gertrude, you distract me,” exclaimed the empress, suddenly clasping her hands on her ears. “ You distract me by your praises, your defence of him. If you think of him thus, what is to save you ? and what must you think of me ? then what is to save *me* ? Oh ! I have long though secretly anticipated this,” and the unfortunate victim of jealousy bowed her head in her hands and wept.

Gertrude never felt so overwhelmed, so much

at a loss how to act or what to say. To offer further exculpation of the emperor were to increase the empress's apprehensions; and after a moment or two spent in silent despair, she sobbed out, "Oh, dearest madam, for God's sake recall your noble self; compose yourself, and reflect what is there to afflict you thus?"

"Alas! Gertrude, but too much. How could you know the emperor's heart as well as I do? He loves you, and I am miserable for ever. The more good, the more amiable you are, the more wretched am I; for indeed, indeed, I would not injure you."

Gertrude rose from her knees in calm despair at this speech. She stood in deep meditation for a moment; then came into her mind a resolution, which, in the course of the day, she found means to execute. It was to bid adieu for ever to the court where, in spite of her best endeavours, she only brought misery to its gentle mistress. She determined to leave it secretly, because she felt convinced that Eliza-

beth's generosity, together with her fears and shame at having the cause suspected, would have induced her to oppose her departure, at all events until she should probably have lost the opportunity of quitting Russia under the protection of the Duchess of Castleton, whose departure she knew was now close at hand.

Accordingly, writing an affectionate and most respectful letter to the empress, in which she stated her reasons for the step she was about to take, and begged permission to return, through her, the presents she had accepted from the emperor,—feeling that nothing could tend more to satisfy the alarmed wife,—she in the course of that day made her way from the palace, and being exceedingly energetic and intelligent when called upon to act decisively, she found means to procure a conveyance to the capital; and arriving in the evening, wrapped in a cloak which she purchased for the purpose, presented herself at the residence of the English ambassador.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Thus ever thus has been my wayward lot
To love and cherish those who loved me not.
Or, if by chance one genial heart I met,
Fate frowned and made it duty to forget.

ANONYMOUS.

SUCH was the tale which Gertrude now imparted to the duchess, who remained silent for several minutes after hearing it. She began really to think that misfortune had marked Gertrude for its own, and that no efforts of judgment or prudence would be able to counteract the baneful influence ; but, as this was not an idea congenial to her sanguine because energetic character, she rejected it immediately and exclaimed,

“ Well, my poor Gertrude, contrary, I will acknowledge, to my anticipations, you have indeed had sufficient cause for the step you have taken, if the means you adopted prove the most prudent ; and I do not say that under the circumstances they may not be so : but tell me now what you purpose doing with yourself ? ”

Gertrude looked down with hesitation in her countenance,—not the hesitation of irresolution, but of timidity,—in imposing yet farther trouble on her generous friend. The duchess took her hand.

“ Do not hesitate for a moment in making known your wishes to me. If you have, in consequence of all this, felt the desire of returning to England, tell me so, and I dare promise that I shall be able to hide you there where surmise could never reach you ; and the little tour we purpose making on our way home would recruit your spirits, and give you fresh strength to make the trial.”

“ Impossible ! it is quite impossible, my kind

and beloved friend !” sobbed Gertrude. “ I am better already than I believed I ever could have been had I lived a thousand years ; but not one iota am I altered in my original determination never to show myself in England again, or anywhere else where my sad story has been heard of. The brand of Cain is upon me, and it becomes me to hide my head.”

“ But, Gertrude, you should remember it is not there by the finger of God.”

“ Then with God I will retire, away from erring and misjudging man. There was but one hope I ever had, but that is at an end. I thought it just possible that Dr. C. might know that Herbert’s life was not in my hands ; but oh, duchess ! he died and made no sign !”

“ Gertrude, it is almost sinful for you to sorrow thus as over an intended crime.”

“ Nay, I do not. Had it been an intended crime, I had not dared to retire to the companionship of God and Herbert’s spirit.”

“ To retire whither ? what are your intentions ? ”

“ Sometimes I regret that I was not brought up a Roman Catholic, as a convent would now be so fit a resting-place for me ; but I intend—I intend—duchess,” she said hesitating, and hiding her head upon the duchess’s shoulder, “ I intend to make a last trespass on your kindness.”

“ What is that ? ” asked the duchess, a little anxious from the enthusiastic tone which Gertrude had assumed.

“ To suffer me to accompany you from hence to Switzerland, and there to take up my abode in some retired corner for the remainder of my days.

“ But, my dear Gertrude, you are too young and lovely to be left thus in a strange country, without friends or protection. Would it not even be better to continue here, where you could if necessary claim the empress’s countenance ? ”

To this Gertrude strongly objected. She did not like Russia or the Russian ladies. She could not think of passing the residue of her days amongst them, and she wished to settle herself somewhere from whence she never should have to remove again.

“There are, I know, cantons in Switzerland,” she said, “where the most primitive simplicity and good-will still exist; and for being quite alone, I have thought of a plan to obviate even that objection.”

The duchess inquired what it was. Gertrude mentioned Miss Wilson, and gave a sketch of her character.

“But, my dear Gertrude, by your account she would be a person rather to be taken care of, than to take care of you.”

“And I will take care of her in reality,” said Gertrude, “while she is old enough to afford the semblance of any protection I shall require; and, what may appear very strange, she is the only one of former days whom I

could endure to see. She will know what I feel, without grieving me by sympathising in my sorrow farther than just to suffer me to indulge it as I like ; and her presence will take from me the sensation of utter loneliness of spirit, to which I have been so long a victim. Then her taciturnity and mechanical docility ensure me against her revealing my sad story to any one. In short, dear duchess, she combines all I now wish for in a companion who is yet not to be a friend."

The duchess, though she thought Gertrude's choice a little different from what her own, under such circumstances, would have been, with her usual liberality made allowance for the fancies of a sick heart, and was too well pleased to find that Gertrude would even suffer so slight a link to be introduced between her and the world, not to second her wishes in this respect. It was accordingly settled that the duchess should write immediately to Mrs. Vandeleur, and request of her, through her son, to have Miss Wil-

son *packed up* and despatched to Berne, with proper directions to wait there until the arrival of the Duchess of Castleton ; and promising that proper provision should be made for her reception ; but taking care, by Gertrude's desire, to express her directions so as to give no clue as to where she was to join Gertrude ; and with the extraordinary kindness and consideration that marked every movement of her life, when the time approached, the duchess despatched one of her own women to take her in charge until their arrival.

This also answered another purpose, as the duke was still in utter ignorance of his lady's *liaison* with Gertrude ; and as it was deemed advisable that he should continue so until she was safely settled in her new destination, it was necessary that she should accompany the duchess's party in some disguise. There was only one that seemed practicable, that of *femme de chambre*, and the duke was given to understand that she supplied the place of her whom

the duchess had despatched to wait for them at Berne.

“ But do you not fear running into the lion’s mouth ?” said the duchess to Gertrude, as the day of their departure approached ; “ do you never anticipate the possibility of being discovered and reclaimed by the count ?”

“ Not in the least,” she replied. “ He will never appear to me again. If by any chance he is thrown in my way, which will indeed be a strange chance in the seclusion to which I shall confine myself, he will turn aside, and make as though he saw me not. He was not just ruffian enough to murder me, though I believe he has long thought me dearly purchased even with the luckless estate tacked to me ; but now that he has got rid of me, and when even my dowry is a matter of doubt, he will never stand his trial in England for the chance of gaining one, with the certainty of the other.”

“ And you do not think he has made away with himself in a fit of the remorse that often

seizes villains when they find that they have sinned to no purpose ?”

“No, I am convinced he has not. There is a sort of determined elasticity, if I may use the expression, in his character, which not only bears him up against every misfortune, but makes every misfortune a trifle to him. He is a gambler in the widest meaning of the term ; he tries, speculates upon everything ; thinks no risk too great to run, having little to lose ; and when one ticket proves a blank, remembers there are prizes still in Fortune’s wheel. I am satisfied he is this moment deep in some scheme of life in America, or some distant country, as if nothing agitating had ever occurred to him ; and all this without liveliness, or even the characteristic gaiety of his country. I never saw any one who gave me such an idea of heart having turned all into head, as he does.”

“Yet his head has not hitherto done much for him.”

“Do you think it ever can, without a particle of heart? don’t you think, to deal with human beings, we must have sympathies in common with them? in short, don’t you think the fair laws of proportion are necessary to perfection in everything?”

“Who made you so philosophical, my Gertrude?”

“De l’Espoir. My beloved Herbert indeed endeavoured to teach me many wise maxims, but I was too happy then to let them reach my heart; still they tingled in my ears, and when I went to Paris, I believe the grand attraction which De l’Espoir’s society had for me was, that he termed himself *philosophe*, which we used to call him whom I cannot now bear to name with him. My mind was too unformed to judge of the different schools to which they belonged; and as of course they held many laws in common, I imagined they agreed in all things, and quaffed eagerly the draughts of knowledge that De l’Espoir present-

ed to me, alas ! alas ! I need not tell you with what fatal effect."

" My dearest Gertrude, you are not the least like yourself this evening ; you are bursting upon me quite in a new light. Where is my childish, innocent, untutored little *protégée* ?"

" Here ! here !" exclaimed Gertrude, throwing herself into the duchess's arms, " I am lost unless you think me so still, dearest duchess ; it is nearly as bad, worse indeed for oneself, to be all heart as all head : that am I ; and it is only at moments when I feel less miserable than at other times, that I am able even to recall a single idea beyond the pale of my affections and my sorrows ; that I am able even to think or reason on the cause of them, or do anything but weep."

" But you must have thought often and deeply on De l'Espoir's character, to be able to express yourself as you did just now concerning it."

“ No, indeed, I assure you I have not ; but have you never felt that you go on constantly receiving impressions, picking up knowledge, as it were, quite unknown to yourself, and of which perhaps you never become aware until some chance elicits it ? I don’t know that I ever *thought* thus of De l’Espoir before, but I am sure I often felt it, or rather was the unconscious object which received the impressions, that, like those of invisible ink, may come out if subjected to the necessary process, or may remain concealed to all eternity.”

“ But, Gertrude, with your mind, you should not sink utterly under misfortune as you have done.”

“ My dearest duchess,” (twining her arms round her,) “ do you not perceive that, in saying so, you are giving me credit for more mind than I possess ? Saying people should make an effort to overcome a misfortune, is in fact saying they ought to have a power which they have

not: if the observation be made to themselves, it may sometimes be of use, because it, as it were, imparts to them that power, by making them aware of its existence; but otherwise, it is in my mind nonsense; for every effort the mind makes is a self-acting power, or else must be impelled by some invisible agent over which we have no control in the first impulse."

"But," said the duchess, smiling, "now that I have suggested to you to make the effort, do you not acknowledge that you ought to do so?"

"I know at least that I shall try. Strange, oh God! how strange to say, I feel the edge of my despair is becoming sometimes less intensely piercing. I can now sometimes think of hereafter with something like calmness and patience; the nightmare of that man's presence is removed from my mind, and it dares as it were to look about it once again."

"Gertrude, my beloved friend, for indeed

I may call you so, you will be very happy yet."

Gertrude smiled, and turned her beautiful eyes to heaven, with a look of calm conviction of the wildness of the suggestion.

"And why not?" asked the duchess tenderly, answering to that look.

Gertrude turned her eyes on her for a moment.

"Simply because — *I killed my brother;*" and, turning deadly pale, she leaned her head upon the duchess's shoulder, and in a few moments found relief in tears.

"There is one vow you must make to me," said Gertrude, after a long fit of musing; "duchess, you must vow to me that no circumstance will ever induce you to reveal to Godfrey the place of my retreat, or even the country in which it is to be. You know I have declined the request of his mother to correspond with me, which she sent through you."

“ You did indeed, and I thought you most fastidious in doing so.”

“ My dearest duchess, in this one point I must act according to my own sense of right, even against yours, my beloved, inestimable friend. I wish I could think I might be guided by yours : but oh ! duchess, mine is no common love ; I know not whether it was the original nature of my character, or whether it was my frightful fate which fixed the impressions indelibly on my heart, but I feel, I feel, oh ! duchess, that I could not, dare not, ought not to hear of Godfrey, or to know that he is watching over me. My aim is to detach my heart from the world ; it would be the same were I indeed the widow this dress bespeaks me. I might then indulge in loving Vandeleur, but his wife I would never be with so deadly a weight upon my heart ; but now, to cherish my love to him, to feed it at least by food from without, were as impolitic as I feel it would be sinful.”

“ And you really and absolutely have, at your age and with your attractions, bidden adieu to life and all its hopes ? ”

“ I really and truly have : my heart is not formed for suspense, I could not bear it ; remorse still less : so, as you would see me innocent and at peace, promise me that Godfrey shall never learn more than that I am alive and well, comparatively happy ; and never let his name be uttered or written to me, except in either of two events — his *death* or — *marriage*.” She pronounced the words distinctly ; but at one image or the other, or perhaps both, she again became very pale.

Thus adjured, the duchess of course could not refuse to comply with her request. She gave the solemn promise required of her ; and a few days after, having made the apologies she thought would be most acceptable to the empress, for Gertrude’s sudden departure, which, however, she was woman enough to know was already

pardoned, she, with the duke and their suite, in which Gertrude was included, bade adieu to St. Petersburg, and set out on her route to Switzerland.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The mighty sorrow hath been borne,
And she is thoroughly forlorn.
Her soul doth in itself stand fast,
Sustained by memory of the past
And strength of reason ; held above
The infirmities of mortal love ;
Undaunted, lofty, calm, and stable,
And awfully impenetrable.

WORDSWORTH.

SHIFT we the scene !

Fourteen years have now gone by since the opening of our story ; the young have advanced to middle age, the middle-aged have become old, and the old have gone down to their final resting-places ; the joyous and the laughing have become sad and sober, and some, that were sad then, are become happy now.

But while these, and even greater changes, have been taking place amongst the sons of men, the inanimate scenes of nature have remained unmoved. The rock juts as boldly from its deep abiding-place, and the ocean plays its freaks as wildly round it: all that depends on man is subject to his infirmity, and may rise or fall according to his whim. But there is comparatively little over which he has control; the planets roll above his head, the waters roar beneath his feet; to the one he cannot say, "be still," nor to the other, "be ye silent!" Yet much is granted to him; spots of paradise are scattered here and there for his use, and in these he may amuse his baby-mind; the world which he cannot regulate, he may mimic, and within some small enclosure bid it live in miniature for him.

Amidst the countries of the eastern hemisphere, I know of none better calculated for this great-little object than some parts of Switzerland. There the spectacle of creation attains so

much of soul-expanding majesty, assumes so many graces enchanting the imagination ; there so intimate is the blending of the terrible and the lovely, that the poet might be tempted to fable that the wildness of Switzerland had wedded with the softness of its neighbour Italy, and that the magnificently varied scenes were the offspring of the union,

“ Where every day

Soft as it rolls along, shows some new charm,
The father's lustre, and the mother's bloom !”

For many a paradise of bright verdure and blushing flowers lies fondly nestled among those stern granite cliffs ; soft pastoral valleys, with their deep cool moss and enamelled turf, wind through the gloomy solitudes of the howling forest ; the chaunt of summer birds from many a scented nook thrills blithely above the deadened roar of distant cataracts ; and the sunlight dallies with the sparkling gush of tiny rills below : while, far above, the giant Alps rear their icy pinnacles, height over height, against the unclouded æther ; and, in the vast-

ness of the contemplation, the gazer's breath grows laboured, and a shuddering silence falls on the parted lips, until awe and rapture soar above the bounds of conscious frailty, and break out in glorious song :

“ Ye ice-falls ! Ye that from the mountains brow
Adown enormous ravines slope amain !
Torrents methinks that heard a mighty voice,
And stopped at once amid their maddest plunge !—
Motionless torrents ! silent cataracts !—
Who made you glorious as the gates of heaven
Beneath the keen full moon ? Who bade the sun
Clothe you with rainbows ? Who with living flowers
Of loveliest blue spread garlands at your feet ?
God ! Let the torrents like a shout of nations
Answer, and let the ice-plains echo, God !
God ! Sing ye meadow-streams with gladsome voice.
Ye pine-groves with your soft and soul-like sound !
And they too have a voice, yon piles of snow,
And in their perilous fall shall thunder, God !”

It was on the verge of that savage and impenetrable tract which towers southwards of the lake of T—n, — a region where hills are piled on hills like the ruins of a former world, — but in one of the loveliest of those pastoral valleys that descend among the mountain gorges, one the

most hitherto unknown and unfrequented, that the scene passed which was the subject of the third picture in the gallery to which I alluded, and which I endeavoured to describe, in the opening chapter of this narrative.

There was a beautiful cottage—it preserved the picturesque character of the country in which it rose—but with that was blended the comfort and even the elegance of England: beneath its porch sat a lady and gentleman, exactly as I have already described them in the painting, except that, all vivid as that painting was, it could not do justice to the lights and shades that passed over each countenance as they conversed together, not calmly, and yet not passionately.

“No—no—no—my friend,” said the lady, “it is all over; there have been moments indeed, ay, days, months, years, when, borne up on the wings of my young ardent spirits, I have felt persuaded that there was some peculiar happiness in store for me; I have looked out

upon the summer landscape, and have felt that happiness could not be that illusory thing that men have deemed it. I have seen it before me, and only waited to burst through some slight trammel of time or space to seize it. I have pursued it with as much faith and hope as ever did the alchemists their search after their golden dream, but, like that, it flitted *still* before me ; and if indeed there was anything of presentiment in these self-gratulatory feelings, it has only been that I should attain very, very near to the blissful phantom, and sometimes be happy in the very anticipation of happiness ; but no more : and yet so strong have been my natural aspirings after it, that even since the curse of Cain fell upon me, I have had my dreams ; *his* spirit was to be guardian angel to mine, for *they* never sinned against each other ; and the one chastening remembrance was to purify and temper down my happiness here to the pitch that is permitted to man ; still it *was* to be happiness, but it is years now since I have

had these dreams. I will not say I am grown wiser or better ; but my fancy has grown tired of them, my patience is worn out, or has changed its nature. I abandon them for ever. The Almighty will allow me to turn even in my disappointment all to him, and herein I think it is that his divine superiority comes most touchingly home to us. Man, in his cruel pride and enduring resentment, turns from the broken heart that turned perhaps from him in *its* hour of prosperity ; but God, God only accepts the sacrifice of the afflicted spirit, turn to him when it will. How beautifully, by the bye," she said, sinking a little from her tone of melancholy enthusiasm, " how very beautifully Moore expresses that idea in the exquisite little hymn, ' Oh Thou who driest the mourner's tear,' do you remember it ?

‘ Oh Thou who driest the mourner’s tear !
How sad this world would be,
If, when oppress’d and wounded here,
We could not fly to Thee !’

not that I believe he meant all that I mean—

for I mean the excelling goodness and mercy of God, not only in comforting us when the world afflicts us, but in allowing us to think that we even please him by offering to him the shattered remains of the heart that we have first offered round the world, and that has been rejected by it. Moore's idea is freer from the leaven of human frailty than mine is. He speaks of wounds and afflictions coming upon us from others, I speak of those we bring upon ourselves; still, still there is *God* to 'dry the mourner's tear.' How consoling, tender, and beautiful are the expressions in that little hymn, and in some others he has written! and yet I have heard his fellow-creatures, his fellow-sinners, and those too who set up as excelling in goodness, so utterly forget the precepts of charity and good-will preached by their divine Master, him at least whom they *call* Lord and Master, as to exclaim in pious horror at 'Moore's presuming to write religious verses!' But this narrow-minded daring, this presump-

tinuous judging of their neighbour, in spite of the awful doom denounced against that hateful sin which involves so many others within itself, is a subject upon which I cannot trust myself to speak, scarcely to think, lest I too fall into the same error.—But I perceive I am wearying you ; you take no interest in what I am saying : perhaps this is a subject not even worth ridicule in the world now ; but you must remember that I have not stirred out of this retirement for twelve long years, and then wonder not at any antediluvian ideas you may detect in me.”

“ That you have exiled yourself for twelve long years, I remember but too well ; but is it possible that you have continued in this same spot so long, while I have been a wanderer over the face of the earth ? and, above all things, tell me what can have prompted you to this enduring cruelty to your friends ? Why did you not return to your country when you learned, that, not only the prosecution was withdrawn,

but the story of your misfortunes gone abroad like the history of a martyr?"

The lady looked down for a moment, to conceal a slight blush ere she replied. "Alas! how little it would appear, even you can read my heart! That my name is cleared from all odium, or obloquy, is rather grateful to me than otherwise; that it should have been necessary, lowers my estimate of human nature; but that any one, and especially you, my friend, could suppose that thereby my objection to appearing again in the world was done away, does indeed astonish me. Did the public opinion render me more or less guilty? or, did the danger of our losing my estate render me less safe from the return of ——; but of that I will not speak. Let it convince you how dead I am to such concerns, when I tell you that I never even suffered the Duchess of Castleton, that inestimable friend, who is my only channel of communication with the world, to write me the particulars of the prosecution being with-

drawn. I receive one letter from her every six months ; and that one is, at my request, confined to informing me of the welfare of herself and her family. I have been, you see, very determined in keeping my mind turned completely from the world."

" It is most strange !" exclaimed the gentleman, apparently thinking aloud ; " you are a strange and powerful character !"

" By no means ; rather the contrary ; unless you conceive strength of character to consist in wishing to do right, and keeping as many difficulties as I can out of my way : but let us not talk of that either ; rather tell me now, since I am for this evening a human being again, what *did* induce my cruel kinsman to withdraw his prosecution ?"

" Your kinsman is not by any means the fiend that we all, who knew you, believed him to be ; he is rather that mixture of good and evil that is, I fear, the commonest character. He no sooner ascertained that you were not

only innocent in thought, word, and deed, but had already suffered what might be considered sufficient punishment for the deadliest crimes, than he withdrew his claim at once, and was the loudest in execrations against your destroyer. The means of his being led to this conviction were indeed curious. Do you remember the surgeon who attended me in St. Petersburg ?”

“ Surely. M. Dumoulin ; a kind and good-natured man ; it were strange if I forgot him.”

“ Well, I do not know whether you are aware that the count had bound himself to pay a handsome sum of money to the uncle of this man, whenever he should obtain your fortune, and of course this young man was to share it ; for this purpose chiefly, Dumoulin continued as a sort of spy upon De l’Espoir’s movements, as they had no great trust in his honesty : but when their hopes seemed upon the very verge of accomplishment, De l’Espoir and you suddenly slipped through his fingers, he never hearing of

the cause the count had for flight. He waited for some time in hopes of hearing from him ; but, when he gave this up, he wrote to his uncle in London, to inform him that the bird had escaped them after all, just as the golden egg might be expected. The old German became infuriated ; he forgot everything but his revenge ; and supposing that De l'Espoir was privately but regularly receiving your income, without thinking of *his* reward, he came to me and to Lord Foxhill, as your father's executors, and laid the whole matter before us. You will believe that I lost no time in communicating it to the heir-at-law, and the suit was of course abandoned. My trust and aim in this was, that you would return to England ; and that if that wretched man, tempted by the accession of your wealth, ever ventured to return, that you would make the greater part of it over to him upon condition of his never troubling you again."

" The duchess hinted at this compromise

to me ; but, besides that I knew not where he was, I should, as I said before, never think of returning to England under such circumstances."

" But why ? why ? what have you found in this valley so attractive as to supersede all earlier feelings ?"

" Peace !" said the lady emphatically ; " peace ! which I should never have found in scenes where I once looked for more and lost all."

" And have you lived here without a friend except poor old Miss Wilson, who seems now to have lost the only mode of communication she ever had, that of nodding, now that it has become confirmed into an unceasing habit."

" No ; she has not been my only friend. I have been most fortunate under my peculiar circumstances. On our first leaving Russia, the dear Duchess of Castleton never for one moment forgot my comfort ; and you would have supposed by the inquiries she found means of

instituting in every place we came to, that to settle me respectably was the sole object of her tour. It was throughout most fortunate for me that the duke was of that passive, *far-niente* character, which induced him never to trouble himself about any of his lady's plans or projects for the benefit of others, though he never refused her his assistance when she required it. After being almost reduced to despair, at the town of —, where the duke took a fancy to remain a week, we at length by dint of persevering inquiries, such as must certainly, adroitly as they were conducted, have excited the curiosity of those of whom they were made, heard of two English ladies who resided in a cottage in a very retired valley about twelve miles from the town, and near to the Convent of Santa Catarina,—in short, in *this* valley. The duchess made a visit to them, and learned their story; they proved to be two old Irish ladies, who, with their father, had fled at the time of the rebellion of 98, he being deeply implicated. They were Roman Ca-

tholics ; and an elder sister became a nun, and, having some property of her own, founded a convent here. Their father died soon after their arrival, and they remained ever since buried in the seclusion they had chosen : but, notwithstanding that seclusion, they still remembered enough of other days to know that the dukedom of Castleton was one of the proudest amongst English titles ; and the grace, beauty, and fascination, which you must admit shine conspicuously about our dear duchess, took their imaginations captive in an instant. She made known the object of her visit. She informed them that an unfortunate young creature, whom her partiality sketched as interesting, had been by the most perfidious arts betrayed into a wretched marriage, from which, as it could not be dissolved, she had no resource but in concealment ; and that her friends were anxious to procure for her the countenance of some respectable residents in the country which she preferred. The amiable old ladies listened with

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pity and interest. The duchess besought them to visit her at her hotel, and judge for themselves of the object : this they declined ; but, completely won by the duchess herself, they promised to be to me all that she had asked, which then only amounted to being charitable neighbours ; but far, far indeed have they since surpassed that promise ! Miss Wilson was written for to Berne ; she joined us at the hotel ; and, within an hour after, the duchess, she, and I were on our way hither. An apartment had been taken for Miss Wilson and me in a cottager's dwelling, until I should select some spot on which to build one for myself ; but the amiable and kind-hearted Irish women, prepossessed by the duchess in my favour, never suffered me to occupy it for one single hour. I was absolutely compelled to take up my abode with them until this cottage was finished, and here I have remained, as the story-book says, ' from that hour to this ! ' ”

“ Good God ! without ever seeing another human being ? ”

“ Not exactly ; I have made occasional visits with them to the convent of which their sister is abbess, and have been so charmed with all I saw there, that—will you believe it ?—I have sometimes thought of becoming a nun myself, and taking up my abode with them for ever ! ”

“ I could believe any cruelty, after what you have been capable of, in hiding yourself so pertinaciously for so long ; but luckily this is not in your power, they could not receive the vows of a married woman.”

“ God could receive them, and the lady, having founded the convent herself, has the power of dispensing with some rules ; besides which, they are so much attached to me, and so anxious to make a convert of me, that they would waive a great deal in my case. But come,” she said, smiling, “ these are vague fancies, and have only flitted rarely across my mind.”

“ I should hope so indeed, or you are more

utterly lost to me than I have yet dared to believe. Gertrude," he said, in a tone of such deep feeling that his features seemed almost convulsed, "you can never know what I felt when I heard of the sudden determination of the Duke of Castleton to return to England, and thought of you being left alone in that strange and distant country; for I feared, from what the duchess had told me, that you would not so soon return to England. I was just preparing to set out once more for St. Petersburg when the duchess's letter arrived, desiring that Miss Wilson should be sent to Berne, and requesting in your name that I should make no farther inquiries until the return of the duchess to England: tortured as I was, I felt obliged to obey; but when the duchess did arrive, and I found that I was never to learn more than that you still lived——But I will pass over my feelings then; some recollections there were that saved me from despair, but they did not always avail me. I hung on for a long time in this

dreadful situation, still hoping that either you or your friend would relent, and at least let me learn how you passed your time : but one final interview with the duchess, in which I was more unfortunate than usual, destroyed this lingering hope ; she told me the secret was not hers to impart, that her honour was pledged to you, and I left her in despair. Soon after this, which I dare say was two years after I had been in Russia, my poor mother, broken down I think a good deal by sympathy in my misfortunes, fell sick, and, after lingering for a few months, paid the penalty of our fallen nature. I was then left without even an interest in life, or a tie to engage any affections ; I could not endure the dreadful vacuum in my heart and mind—I wished for employment ; but though I knew I could by the Duke of Castleton's interest procure one with very little trouble, my mind was still in that enfeebled, apathetic state, that I turned with loathing from everything that called for cold and formal attention to sti-

pulated duties, and from the mockery of receiving emolument where I had already more than my languid desires suggested the expenditure of. In this state of feeling I thought of endeavouring to lessen the miseries of my fellow-creatures, not so much as a religious duty, as an exercise likely to keep the feelings from the hell of utter stagnation, or rather of only preying on themselves : to render my views on this subject more efficacious, I determined upon entering into holy orders."

"Holy orders ! do you mean to say that you are a clergyman ?"

"No : when I first mentioned the subject, the Duke of Castleton kindly pressed me to accept a living ; but besides that, as I said before, I had more income already than I wanted for my own support, I neither liked to be bound to one place, nor fettered in what I may call my *whims* of benevolence ; and, to say truth, I did not care to be paid, as a religious professor, for what I embraced from such decidedly selfish motives."

“ In short, then, you are become a sort of lay missionary ! wandering over the world to make converts—to the Church of England of course ? ”

“ I have indeed been wandering over the world ; yet I neither call myself a missionary, nor do I ever seek to make converts except from vice. I have never yet endeavoured to subvert one principle *professed* to be taught by any church ; for I do not believe that it is by such principles, or doctrines as I should rather call them, obscure and above the comprehension of the wisest of us, that the poor and the ignorant will be judged. I believe it will be by the use they make of the instincts implanted in them by the finger of God himself, namely, ‘ faith, hope, and charity,’ and confirmed by divine revelation.”

“ Well, but *faith, what faith ?* ”

“ Faith in their Creator—hope in their Redeemer—charity to all men. With these, truly and deeply engraven on their hearts, and made manifest by their works, I care as little in what

form their little acts of devotion, as they are called, may be offered, as I should care if some friends, wishing to evince their respect for me, should one select one way, and another another for doing so. No: I have even prevented conversions, as you call them, when I have thought them merely the effect of momentary enthusiasm, or, what is still more frequently the case, of disguised vanity and spiritual pride."

"You are indeed as I ever ——" The lady stopped abruptly, and a slight shade of colour passed over her pale but still lovely face.

"I am what, Gertrude? I am truly blessed at this moment in having found you after all my wanderings, which, though I never dared to tell myself distinctly that such was my object, yet I am convinced were still influenced by it. About a week since, I came to the village of——; not that there is much immorality in these primitive regions, but I was requested to visit it for a short time, as I need not tell you, I suppose, that there is no resident clergyman for many

miles round it. In my hours of leisure I of course explored the beautiful scenery about ; and when I tell you that neither in these, nor any other hours, or even moments of leisure, you have ever been absent from my thoughts for the last fourteen years, you may judge of my feelings when I met you wandering in that exquisite valley this evening."

The lady's countenance underwent a peculiar change. The melancholy, which had passed away from it for a moment, returned with a still deeper shade, but now blended with an expression of soul-touching tenderness as she answered, " I can indeed, my dear friend, imagine by my own that they must have been most affectionate ; but I trust, I trust, not inconsistent with our unchanged, *unchangeable* position with respect to each other."

" In Heaven's name, Gertrude, what do you mean by *unchanged*, *unchangeable* ? and inconsistent with *what* ?"

" With my being the wife of De l'Espoir,

Vandeleur, which I think you almost forgot at the moment of our meeting. You are aware he still lives?"

"I gathered from the duchess that you suspected it some time ago."

"Suspected it! I knew it. When, won by the kindness and affection of my two old friends here, I confided my story to them, they, without any suggestion from me, made inquiries through their Parisian banker, if anything had been heard of him; through that channel we ascertained that he had gone to the Antilles, and suppressing his name and title—now become a dangerous distinction—had settled there as a merchant, and was amassing immense wealth: through the same channel they hear regularly of his welfare."

Vandeleur, on receiving this information, remained for several minutes in a profound silence: at length he said, "Gertrude, do you never mean to leave this cottage?"

"Never, except for a still narrower dwelling-

place : where should I go to ? unless indeed," she added with a smile, "to the convent."

"Then here also will I end my days," the gentleman exclaimed in a tone of cool and calm decision.

"Here ! how or what do you mean ?"

"Why no, not exactly to take possession of your house; but I shall procure one for myself close by, and 'hand in hand' we may still 'go down the hill together;' what though they be but clasped in friendship?"

It was now Gertrude's turn to be silent for a few minutes ; but her ever expressive countenance plainly indicated that the pause was not one of indecision, but merely a wish to select the gentlest language in which to convey her determination.

"It is impossible, utterly impossible : Vandeleur, it must not be," she said at last. "In what respect are either of us so much changed as that I should now consent to what I so determinately fled from twelve years ago, when

most miserable, and, God knows, requiring all the consolation which friendship could afford?"

"Then you are not miserable now?"

"No, thank Heaven! that word would be much too strong for my present state of mind: the one black spot is in my heart, which would alone, were every other objection removed, prevent my presuming to seek the enjoyments of life, from which I cut *him* off; but still the natural buoyancy of my temper, my unbroken health, and the cultivation of my tastes under the inspiring influence of this charming scenery and climate, together with the surest remedy of all—the lapse of time—have left me at this moment far from miserable. Could you believe, Godfrey, that I have become so calm under my infliction,—so familiar, as it were, with my Herbert's spirit now,—that, having cultivated my native taste for painting, under the direction of one of the sisters of the convent, I have made a picture of the first evening in which my beloved brother and I spoke in confidence of you?"

It appears to me and to Miss Wilson a striking likeness ; come in and see it."

Vandeleur followed her into the interior of the cottage, where, in her only sitting-room, he observed a large picture shaded by a muslin drapery ; some feeling, which the fair artist, or else the mourning sister, had not yet overcome, having induced her to conceal it from the glare of day, or the casual observation of even her very limited circle of acquaintances. She now advanced to it, and, drawing aside the curtain, displayed to Vandeleur the first of the three pictures which so powerfully attracted my attention in the gallery of ——.

Vandeleur stood for a moment confounded by the extraordinary likeness of the boy ; then, as the recollections of that blissful evening crowded upon his mind, he burst into tears and rushed out of the room. Gertrude let fall the curtain over the picture once more ; and delaying a few minutes, as well to suffer him to recover, as to banish all traces of the emotion

which she herself experienced, she rejoined him in the porch.

“ I need not ask if you think the likeness a good one ?” she said softly, still anxious to have it confirmed by his lips.

“ It is life itself,” he replied ; “ have you done any others ?”

“ Of him ? No. Though I had resolution enough to plan and even to execute that design, I would not undertake another : I was nearly three years completing it ; my tears almost effaced every feature just in proportion as it grew like : but I am now engaged in doing one to represent my first interview with the Duchess of Castleton, which was another critical period of my life ; but it is not yet advanced enough for you to see it.”

“ And in these pursuits you have found the tranquillity which I am as far as ever from attaining ; and yet you refuse to let me partake of it, Gertrude ?”

“ And where would it be then ? How long,

think you, it would last when self-condemnation began to mingle with it? No, no, Vandeleur; I would, God knows, give up my own tranquillity to ensure yours, but not by means which would deprive us both of it: a great part of mine is based upon the belief that Herbert's spirit is still hovering over me,—for *he* knows I never sinned against him,—and that he approves of the self-denial I have practised ever since.”

Vandeleur gazed upon her with an expression in which, if something of earthly passion still lingered, it was tempered, if not neutralised, by her holy enthusiasm. It passed away however, when she ceased speaking; and with a return of anxious pleading he asked, “But, Gertrude, is this self-denial that you speak of, merely to avoid the misconstruction of a world that has long lost sight of us both, and would never come to seek us here?”

“And if it be,” she said, evading the question, and turning aside to conceal a conscious blush, “if even that be essential to my peace, you

would not urge the contrary? No, Vandeleur, I know you would rather contribute to my happiness; and the only means in your power to do so is, to promise me that you will be happy yourself."

"Away from you? never!" he exclaimed with vehemence, starting from a reverie into which he had fallen. "I have imposed duties upon myself, and I fulfil them; but it is only like taking an opiate to drown recollection for a time, that it may return at intervals with redoubled anguish."

"Vandeleur, you terrify me," said Gertrude, her countenance indeed confirming what she uttered. "Is this what you call religion?"

"Pardon me, you cannot have attended to what I said. I neither tried to deceive you nor myself—and the Almighty I could not deceive—as to the motives which induced me to take up this profession, if I may call it so. There were but two courses left for me to avoid a state of apathy which I could not en-

dure ; a course of blind and heartless dissipation, or that I have chosen. Your image, and, I will hope, something more, withheld me from the former ; and I adopted the latter as being at once innocent and not foreign to my natural disposition, which the acquisition of money without an object would have been. If I have been of some use ; if I have bound up some bruised and broken spirits, or led one human being aside from vice ; I am grateful for the temporary gratification it afforded me : but I found no merit upon it, no claim to be called a religious character. But, even as a remedy against misery, how far short has it fallen of success ! my thoughts have been sometimes filled, my feelings interested, but my affections - never ! Yet let me not shock you, my dear Gertrude. I had been more or less than man could I have forgotten my interest in you ; and, *less* I think it must have been, whilst I believed you in a miserable exile. Since I see you happy and beautiful as ever, I shall endeavour to bear

my own burden more lightly ;” but the look and manner that accompanied these words seemed to contradict their import.

“ Oh, Vandeleur, that you could cease to think it a burden !” said Gertrude in a soft and deprecating tone. “ Now that you see me comparatively happy, oh that you would become so yourself ! and since your benevolent exercises do not, unhappily, satisfy you, why will you not seek it from some other source ?”

“ How do you mean, Gertrude ?”

“ If you would but marry, dearest Vandeleur.”

“ Marry ! marry ! are you quite mad, Gertrude ? Never, even for one single moment, has the bare possibility of such an event crossed my mind.”

“ It is exactly for that reason that I suggest it to you. You are still in what is often called the prime of man’s life ; and since you paid me a compliment just now, I can with sincerity return it, and say you wear your years particu-

larly well. Many, many an amiable, ay and fair young girl, could you find to make you a happy husband and father."

"Yes, to sell herself, or be sold to me for an establishment."

"Not so, Vandeleur. They do women gross injustice who assert that they cannot sincerely love an amiable agreeable man, if he be not also young. An objection there is in the usual dissimilarity of tastes, when the disparity in years is great; but good sense and good temper on both sides—and I would not have you marry any one without them—will make molehills of what seem mountains to others."

"Yes, and this is what I am to be content with, instead of heaven's own happiness which I once expected, —perfect blending of being, soul, and mind, until two imperfect creatures, under the sweet control of each other's love, grow into one perfect one, each for the other's sake, and so at last return to their Creator, never more to be divided; and such I am con-

vinced is the happiness which marriage was intended to confer."

"When Eve was created for Adam, perhaps it was, and may sometimes even happen still; but, oh! so rarely, that which of Adam's fallen sons will presume to say such should be his lot?"

"And yet, oh God! it might have been *mine!*" Vandeleur exclaimed in deep emotion; but it was the emotion of him who looks for one despairing moment over the side of some vessel in a storm, to catch a last glimpse of the treasure that has been swept overboard, and which the waves are about to ingulph for ever from his view. A shade passed over the lady's brow.

"No more of that! it is unbecoming, it is sinful," she said.

"It is *not* sinful, so help me Heaven! Unbecoming, or at least most fruitless, it may now be; but sinful my feelings are not, and never were upon that subject. If they had

been, I should not feel so much pain in relinquishing them. There is always something in doing right, that consoles one for the sacrifice it may require. I mean not this theologically. I mean that the mind which has strength enough for the effort, will always feel a certain degree of pleasure in the exercise of it ; but here, to give up all hopes——”

“Hopes !” repeated the lady with a look of sad reproof. “Hopes ! and on what can such hopes be founded ? Oh, think upon the last commandment ; think upon Him who in his wisdom said the *wish* was the *crime*.”

“It is in vain, Gertrude,” said Vandeleur utterly unmoved, “in vain that you would seek to alarm me upon this subject. I never broke that commandment. I never coveted the wife of another. I would not, God knows, —even if I could, I would not—take her to my bosom as such, even now after the long years of hopeless misery I have endured ; but how is the commandment broken in seeking the

pure friendship which now alone can—or even in the humble hope that the time may yet come when——”

“ Vandeleur, no more !” said the lady, interrupting him ; “ for *your* feelings I cannot exactly answer ; from my own I know, I *know*, that the indulgence of such hope is highly dangerous, if not in itself sinful ; and will *they* not be doubly guilty who knowingly incur the danger of that guilt ? But I have yet another argument in store. I said twelve years ago, and I repeat it now with a determination as fixed, that were I even free to marry, with my brother’s blood upon my head, I never would become the wife of any man !”

“ This is fanaticism, madness, Gertrude ; but alas ! there is no occasion to dispute it yet. I will hope that if the blessed time should ever come——”

“ Vandeleur, I will not hear you talk thus ; and more, I will not have you think thus. Did I not even believe it sinful, I would not have,

you waste your life in pursuit of a phantom. There is yet a way to end it,—a deep and solemn vow,” and she raised her hands and eyes to heaven, “that no time, *no time*, no circumstances, shall ever induce——”

Vandeleur seized her arm convulsively. “Speak it not ! think it not !” he gasped forth. “Gertrude, we have already suffered enough from an oath of yours, deferring our marriage. If I must abandon all I have hitherto dragged on existence for, let it be by means which *I* also shall recognise as binding. What power could the oath of another have over my conscience ?”

Gertrude feared to irritate him by farther opposition, but by her own feelings she knew what a change the utter impossibility of their ever being united would necessarily produce in his ; and at that very moment a thought, a plan, a determination, was formed in her mind. She had lost none of her early enthusiasm, and she believed the thought to be almost inspira-

tion. She gave it no utterance, but averted her head to conceal the tears that forced themselves to her eyes at sight of his emotion. He did not appear to notice her or them, but leaned back in moody silence. Gertrude wished to interrupt the train of his reflections.

“Vandeleur!” she said, and laid her hand upon his arm as if to soften the seeming cruelty of what she was about to say—“Vandeleur, it is almost time that we should part, evening is falling fast around us.”

He attempted to lay his hand on hers, but she hastily withdrew it with matronly dignity;—and it was this moment that was so happily caught in the third picture of the series—and her eyes did indeed beam with the reproving yet pitying affection of a being of another sphere for one not yet perfected.

She feared he had misconstrued her forbearing her intended vow at his request; she was anxious to undeceive him: “Yes, we must part, Vandeleur,” she said, “and——” She

hesitated to complete her sentence ; he took it up.

“ And how early may I come to-morrow ? ”

Still she hesitated, rapidly changed colour, and cast her eyes upon the ground ; he could not imagine what occasioned her emotion, and gazed upon her in astonishment. She clasped her hands together, and in the gentlest and most supplicating manner, a manner that was peculiarly her own, she said,

“ Vandeleur, dear, dear Vandeleur ; do not be angry with me, but we must—indeed we must—*meet no more !* ”

Vandeleur sprang from his seat as if a ball had been shot through him. It was evident that, notwithstanding all Gertrude had been preaching with so much sincerity, some vague hope, some delusion, some—in short, “ anything but leaving her ”—had still kept possession of his feelings, if not of his reason.

“ No more ! meet no more ! ” he exclaimed as soon as he could articulate. “ What ! after

twelve years of accursed separation and misery, do we part thus on the very first meeting? Gertrude," he said in an altered tone, and looking fixedly upon her, "Gertrude, you are either trifling with my feelings, or else your own for me are utterly, utterly changed and gone!"

"I should think the first involves the second," she said gently; "but, dear Vandeleur, think of me whatever will tend most to lessen your own regret."

"Regret for what?"

"For *me*, Godfrey; for indeed—indeed ——— Must I then repeat it?"

"*For indeed we must part*, you would say? and for how long, pray? Are there to be *no* limits to your tyranny?"

"Vandeleur, until you can tell me that the remembrance of me does not stand between you and your being happy with some other object."

"Then indeed farewell *for ever*, Madame de l'Espoir! You said truly that we shall meet no more: you are doubly safe from my presence

henceforth ; first, as I have no power to fulfil your condition ; and secondly, as I find my interest in your regard is at an end.” He rose as he spoke, and, bowing coldly, hastily went out from the porch.

Gertrude stepped forward with the intention of stopping him ; but he either did not perceive, or did not attend to her. Just as she was about to utter his name, in that tone which could not have been resisted, the thought occurred to her—“to what purpose?” and she suffered him to depart. She turned into her lonely abode, sought her own chamber, and, flinging herself upon her knees beside her couch, she buried her face in her hands, and remained in that posture for upwards of an hour. Let no one endeavour to pry into what passed between her and her God !

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“ Jours charmans, quand je songe à vos heureux instans,
Je pense remonter le fleuve de mes ans ;
Et mon cœur enchanté, sur sa rive fleurie
Respire encore l’air pur du matin de la vie.”

WHEN Gertrude rose next morning, it was evident even to her unobservant friend Miss Wilson that some change had been wrought upon her spirit ; the holy calm and quiet she had hitherto enjoyed seemed to have passed away, and a strange and feverish anxiety to have taken possession of her. For herself, she felt that the equilibrium of her mind, which it had required so many years and so much schooling to establish, had been rudely disturbed, and she feared would not be easily restored : she told herself that she had done right in dismiss-

ing her devoted friend, her former lover ; but alas ! she felt that the sacrifice had upset her.

“ But I will atone for it ! I will atone for it ! ” she exclaimed ; “ he shall not thus linger out his precious life in vain hopes of what never, never can take place. Heigho ! I wish I had not seen him, I wish he had not drawn that picture of wedded love : but I will pray, earnestly pray, that he may yet enjoy it with another ; and why should he not. He is indeed no longer young, but he is still eminently handsome ; all the animation and warmth of his earlier years still characterise his delightful manners ; his fine eyes have indeed changed their expression, and are become pensive and melancholy ; but this very circumstance proves that their power of expressing his feelings is still unimpaired, and, if he were happy again, they would again be bright and joyous. I wonder if I am as little changed : I dare say I may be ; for it is the ‘ wear and tear ’ of the feelings and affections, that leave their traces on the

countenance : where these have been smothered and pent up, they are still fresh to shed their animation around one when called forth. But what am I thinking of? what does it signify how much or how little *I* may be changed? nor should I have permitted my mind to dwell so long on *his* appearance, were it not considering it for another. Yes, he has every reason to expect happiness if one fatal fascination were removed; and removed it shall be. In the purity and austerity of a convent my mind will soon again subside from the little agitation that has now assailed it; and when I have vowed my vows, after my own fashion, never under any circumstances to leave that holy place again, even though I may not conform to every ceremony or subscribe to every doctrine, I shall let Vandeleur know my irrevocable doom; and by degrees, when hope is utterly destroyed, he will think less and less of me, and I shall go down to my grave happy in the thought that he is happy !”

Having come to this resolution, Gertrude's mind became for the present more composed ; such generally is the effect of any powerful effort over one's self : but it is when that first glow of satisfaction has expended itself that the trial comes on ; and therefore it is, that every resolution formed in the excitement of our feelings, should afterwards be diligently examined by our reason before we proceed to put it into execution.

Gertrude had had too little experience in life, too few opportunities in her secluded valley of forming resolutions to be kept or broken, to be aware of the caution they require. She felt that there was something necessary to tear her heart and Vandeleur's asunder once more, after the spring they had again made towards each other by their unexpected meeting ; and she imagined that the most desperate means must be the most effectual. She felt no doubt of being admitted on her own terms into the convent of the Irish abbess, as well from that

lady's partiality towards her, as through the influence of the two lay sisters, who were still more intimately attached to her : and, to Gertrude's own feelings and principles, there was nothing so revolting in the Christian sect that had such amiable beings for its sincere votaries, as that she could not conform as far as civility should require when domesticated beneath their roof, whilst her own heart was the temple in which she at all times loved to worship.

In this frame of mind, she despatched a note to one of the two sisters who lived near her, informing her that she intended to visit her that morning on very particular business, and begging to know if she should be at leisure to receive her without interruption. While the messenger was away, Gertrude sat down to the breakfast-table, which had hitherto, in the excitement of her nerves, almost escaped her notice ; although Miss Wilson, in her unaltered habits of mechanical regularity, had eaten hers before her eyes with perfect unconcern.

Gertrude was destined not to partake of any that day.

“Do you expect Major Vandeleur this morning?” asked Miss Wilson as she turned her heavy eyes from the window opposite which she sat.

“No,” said Gertrude very emphatically; “he comes hither no more.”

“Because I think that’s very like him, galloping as hard as he can up towards the house.”

“Impossible!” said Gertrude, starting up and running out to the porch, literally with the intention of preventing him from alighting; but Vandeleur had already given the mule he rode to a man who was doing some little job of husbandry before the cottage, and, entering at once, encountered Gertrude on the very spot where they had parted the evening before.

She was amazed, and almost startled, at the extraordinary change in his appearance: instead of the gloomy melancholy and depression of the evening before, all was now with him joyous

animation ; and, as if utterly forgetful of all that had passed, he seized both her hands, and, kissing them warmly but respectfully, he interrupted all remonstrance by exclaiming,

“ No, no, Gertrude ; this is no moment for trifling forms. I speak not, I feel not, as your lover now ; I forget myself in the happiness I have the power of imparting to you. Read that letter, dearest ;” and he drew one from the breast-pocket of his coat, and handed it to her.

Gertrude, though scarcely able to support herself, from the agitation which his extraordinary manner had excited, received it from his hand, and glanced her eye over it ; but, no sooner had her mind taken in its purport, than, with a wild scream between joy and agony, she flung herself into Vandeleur’s arms, and fainted on his bosom.

Perhaps never since faints were first invented to try the nerves of the lookers-on, was one ever perpetrated that excited so little commiseration, as did that of Gertrude now in the breast

of Vandeleur. He held her from him for a moment, and absolutely smiled in the intensity of his own pleasurable feelings ! Not conceiving, however, that this was exactly a legitimate mode of gratifying them, he carried her into the interior of the cottage, and, placing her on the sofa, called to Miss Wilson for assistance ; but in a tone so light and joyous that even she, in running about for hartshorn and water, two or three times looked back to see if it was not a hoax got up for *her* ! She felt almost confirmed in her suspicion when, on her return, breathless with haste, (a most unusual state of body or mind for her,) she found Gertrude with a countenance beaming with such ecstasy and thankfulness, as she had never seen upon it since the day that Herbert was thrown from his horse ! The moment Miss Wilson entered, Gertrude arose ; and, though choking with the excess of her emotion, threw her arms round her neck,—an excess of feeling and familiarity which that quiescent person had never before expe-

rienced from any one,—and sobbed out, “ Oh ! my dear Miss Wilson ! thank God with me, and for me ! I am not, I am not the murderer of my brother ! ” Will it be believed that Miss Wilson burst into tears ! This was the more extraordinary, as it was never known *how* she had learned that poor Gertrude had ever accused herself of the deed, or even *that* she *had* learned it ; but it proved, perhaps more fully than anything else could have done, how powerful and evident had been the change wrought upon Gertrude by that dreadful conviction, when the sudden removal of it could thus affect one “ albeit unused to the melting mood.” “ Kneel down, Miss Wilson ! kneel down, my dearest Godfrey ! and return thanks with me ! ” Gertrude exclaimed : they obeyed her mechanically, but no one attempted to utter a word ; the overflowing heart feels them so unnecessary ! Gertrude’s joy was, however, too overwhelming to continue under restraint even in prayer. She rose from her knees again : “ Tell me, oh ! tell

me, Vandeleur," she said, still weeping as if the bitterest affliction had fallen upon her, except that the muscles of her mouth were twitching, vibrating as it were, in mockery of her own tears, "tell me where you found this blessed document of heaven, and why you did not tell me of it sooner?"

"Because I did not know of it, my dearest Gertrude: think you I could have concealed it for one single instant? Do you remember, Gertrude, the only commission you gave me from St. Petersburg?" Gertrude's feelings were too deeply engaged at present upon the one engrossing object of her life for any other to gain admittance, and she answered with the most perfect composure, "I do; it was to destroy your letters to me, which were in my little letter-box, and for this purpose I sent you the key of it."

"You did, but I never could endure to execute your commission; I felt as if doing so would destroy the only link that now existed between us. I disobeyed you in the hope—may

I acknowledge it?—that the time might come, when together we should rejoice over the breach of your command ; and I always carried the little letter-box about with me, wherever I travelled, as the most precious part of my luggage. Last night, however, when I really believed, for the first time, that all was over between us, that there had arisen obstacles against me in your own breast, Gertrude,” (and his countenance saddened once more,) “ more hopelessly insurmountable, at least more destructive to my hopes, than any others that fate could oppose, except death itself, I determined, nay, I vowed in the bitterness of my anguish, to destroy those letters of other days, no longer of value in your eyes. I did not reach my home last night ; but the moment I arrived there this morning I shut myself up in my chamber to perform my cruel task, little, indeed, foreseeing what it was to bring about ! For this purpose I took from my neck, where it has hung for twelve years, the little key, and opened the box. The first letter

that met my view was one directed to your father, in a hand I knew, yet could not at the moment recollect. In my capacity of executor I opened it, and I leave it to your own heart to judge the sensations of mine when I read that letter ! I now recollect distinctly your poor father peevishly muttering that he had had a letter of condolence from Dr. C—, but, when I asked to see it, saying he had mislaid it. You may be sure I lost no time in coming to you with the news ; and now, my dearest Gertrude, will this blessed intelligence not make a change in your determinations ?”

“ Vandeleur !” she exclaimed, clasping her hands together, and looking up to heaven in an ecstasy of thankfulness, “ do not talk to me of my determinations, or of the future now ! For the first time, for nearly fourteen years, I feel once more what it is to be happy in the present ! Oh, God ! oh, God ! teach me to bear it as I ought !” She bowed her head again, and remained silent for an instant ; then resumed,

“ But you think, you really think, there is no doubt of this ? that there can be no mistake ? Oh, Vandeleur ! ” and with a sort of sobbing sigh, and beaming smile, she leaned her head for an instant against his shoulder : it was but for one instant, and seemed really to be the effect of the very exhaustion of happiness. “ Vandeleur,” she said, “ you, even you, can have no idea of what I feel this day. Good God ! I am almost startled to find how much of my grief for my beloved Herbert was owing to the idea of my own part in the tragedy : but no, I do myself wrong in saying so ; for nothing, as you know, could exceed my grief during his long illness, and how willingly I sacrificed my own, and even your happiness for him. No ; it only shows that every thing in nature is relative, and that all things are alike to God ! Could I ever have believed it would be positive happiness to me to hear of the impossibility of his ever recovering from the effects of that fatal fall ? and yet now my whole soul is subdued in thank-

fulness to hear it ! Oh ! how can any one ever doubt that there must be some unlimited Mind which sees all things past, present, and to come at a glance, and regulates them accordingly ?”

Vandeleur suffered her to run on for some time longer in this strain, or any other in which the exuberance of her joy and gratitude seemed inclined to vent itself. When she appeared to grow a little calmer, he ventured once more to endeavour to lead her to think of the future. “ But now, dearest Gertrude,” he said, “ now that this oppressive load is removed from your heart, will you not return to England—to your friends ?”

She turned to him with one of the sparkling, speaking smiles of her early youth ; it seemed to say, “ *Might I ?*” but alas ! it scarcely lingered for a moment ; a shade passed over her brow, and a blush over her cheek. “ No, no ; better not,” she said ; “ I am still the wife of De l’Espoir, still the wife of one over whom a criminal prosecution may be impending, or, if

it be abandoned, who perhaps would not even yet leave me at peace ! No, no ; shall I, at the very moment when such an unlooked-for mercy has been vouchsafed to me,—shall I choose that moment to be less thoughtful of my duty, or less scrupulous in avoiding temptation ? Oh ! no,” she exclaimed, bursting again into tears ; “ and I feel mortified at finding how much of my self-denial proceeded from my incapacity for enjoyment, when I thought it all a principle of duty : but I will make the mortification a salutary one ; what I was willing to do from inclination, I will do from duty. Vandeleur, I will not leave this valley ! *there shall be no change in my determinations whatever they may have been !*”

Vandeleur was alarmed at the decisive and emphatic tone in which she pronounced these words ; but, fearing to let them take still deeper root in her mind, he exclaimed, “ For God’s sake, Gertrude, do not give way to this enthusiasm ! ”

“ My dear Vandeleur,” she replied, mildly, but firmly, “ that I am of an enthusiastic tem-

per I am well aware, and that enthusiasm must find vent in some way is as certain. I am by circumstances debarred from exercising it where it only adds zest and warmth to the pleasures of life, therefore do not seek to restrain me from turning it where, at least, it can do harm."

"Then let me remain near you, Gertrude, where I may see you even occasionally; in your fresh accession of happiness you should not be so churlish of it."

"I am not churlish of it, Vandeleur. Heaven, which alone can judge the heart, knows I would transfer it to you if I could; but," she continued, with a bright blush and downcast eyes, "it is not at the moment when I find how I had deceived myself as to the purity of my own motives, that I will yield to what my own wishes might suggest."

"But do not call it yielding to your own wishes, Gertrude; yield in pity, in charity, for the sake of mine."

"No, Vandeleur; for neither. I formed a resolution in my suffering, which I believe

to be right ; I will not shrink from it in my joy !” There was a few minutes’ silence.

“ Gertrude,” said Vandeleur at last, with a gloominess of voice and manner, “ Gertrude, you have not the smallest regard for me remaining. I am worse than a fool to persecute you any longer.”

Gertrude was considering how to reply to this speech, when the door opened ; and instead of the answer to her note to the old lady, which she had expected, that lady herself made her appearance. Gertrude sprang forward to receive her ; but, whether it was the joyous change in her own feelings and deportment, or whether there really was any foundation for it, she imagined that she perceived something more reserved and serious than usual in the lady’s air and manner. Gertrude hastened to present Vandeleur, mentioned each to the other as her particular friend, and gave a hurried account of her accidental meeting with the latter.

Still it would not do. The old lady, though usually cheerful and chatty, sat silent and sub-

dued. At last Gertrude said, "It was very good of you to take the trouble of coming to me, instead of allowing me to go to you ; but I have some news for you which your kind heart will consider as amply repaying you."

"And I have news for you," the lady said with the same gravity, "which I thought it more proper to inform you of here, than to bring you to my house to learn."

Gertrude, who was actively concerned with her two old friends in many little schemes of benevolence and utility, concluded that the lady alluded to something relating to some of these ; but, surprised at the seriousness of her tone and manner, and perceiving that Vandeleur's presence seemed a restraint upon her, she asked if she should wish to speak to her in another room, and, with an apologetic smile and bow to Vandeleur, she retired with her. Before, however, Gertrude could suffer the lady to commence her communication, whatever it might be, in the tumult of her own joy she caught

her in her arms ; and again weeping, almost hysterically, from the mere effect of uttering such blissful words, informed her of her comparative innocence of her brother's death. The old lady heartily and affectionately congratulated her, and even warmly joined in her renewed thanksgiving.

“ And what will be the consequence of this news ? What will you do now,—go back into the busy world, and forget all the lessons of your adversity ? ”

“ No, my friend ; I trust I never could be guilty of such ingratitude, even were I called to the highest summit of earthly bliss that my own heart could covet ; but as I never have concealed anything from you, my respected friend, I will not conceal now that I should not wish to be subjected to the cruel trial of daily and hourly seeing pictures of domestic happiness before my eyes, which once seemed destined to be my own lot ; and to know that one” (and she laid her blushing check against that of

her old friend) “ whose soul is still centred in me, is withering under the same regrets. No ; I will fly from the temptation of useless repining, and I will put the temptation for ever out of *his* way. My friend, I am going to enter into your sister’s convent !”

Had a thunderbolt burst at the old lady’s feet, it could not have more astounded, though it might have more alarmed her, than this announcement at this particular moment. That Gertrude would in time become a Roman Catholic, where she scarcely ever saw any person of another persuasion ; and even that, in future years, they might all find the convent their final resting-place, might, and probably did, occasionally flit across the imaginations of the amiable sisters ; but that the sudden and irrevocable resolution should be adopted by Gertrude herself at this particular moment, when for the first time she betrayed the joyous, bounding animation and happiness of her earlier days and natural disposition ; and at the moment too, when, after a separation of twelve years, the

lover of her youth, and the still beloved friend of her chastened feelings, sat once more beside her, appeared an anomaly so strange, that the old lady was almost tempted to burst out laughing at it. There was more than all this too in the news she had herself to impart, to make it appear one of those critical moments, that have occurred at some periods of every one's existence ; when the fortunate have had ever after to congratulate themselves on a lucky escape, the unfortunate to mourn over some irrevocable step ; or, as Shakspeare more eloquently expresses it, it was that

Tide in the affairs of men,
Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune ;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.

The news which the old lady had to impart was, that Gertrude's wretched husband was no more ! It was not the regular time for her hearing from her banker ; but as he was on terms of more than professional acquaintance with her family, and as she had always ex-

pressed a great desire to be informed of anything that might transpire respecting De l'Espoir, the gentleman had the kindness, as soon as the news reached him through De l'Espoir's own man of business, to write to his fair correspondent to inform her of the event. All the necessary particulars were given. He had died at the Antilles of the yellow fever ; leaving, as the newspapers asserted, a wife, (the daughter of a wealthy planter,) and two children, to deplore his loss.

When the old lady received this news, her first feeling was unmixed delight ; and she was just setting out to inform Gertrude of it, when she received her note. As she walked along, she composed her features and deportment to the decent gravity becoming the announcement she was about to make ; and there was something that struck her in finding Gertrude in such animated and evidently not melancholy emotion, seated beside her early lover, that deepened that gravity even more than she intended : but when she retired with that amiable being, and

was made acquainted, not only with the source of her joy, but the uprightness and purity of her principles and resolutions, there appeared to her something so exalted, so heavenly in it all, that she considered for a moment whether it would not be wrong in her to throw any stumbling-block in her way to such perfection, by informing her that the only one that stood between her and earthly happiness was removed. Besides, as *bonne Catholique*, she was not sure how far she should be justifiable in preventing a conversion; and such her sagacity told her would inevitably be the consequence of the communication she had to make. But as, notwithstanding all that is thought, or at least said, to the contrary, being *bonne Catholique* is not absolutely inconsistent with being a kind-hearted, upright, and feeling woman, the old lady asked herself if, after all, she had a right to take the matter of Gertrude's happiness here, or salvation hereafter, so completely into her own hands. "And her conversion must be so sudden too!" she said to herself, "for the

last time we spoke upon this subject, about a fortnight ago, she laughingly evaded all our unanswerable arguments, just as she ever did. I will sound her at all events upon this subject, and I hope act accordingly."

"But, Gertrude," she began, in pursuance of this prudent resolution, "your conversion, my dear, is little short of a blessed miracle; or were you only pretending to hold out so long?"

"No, indeed, my kind friend; I never pretended anything on the subject, nor will I deceive you now. The truth is, I am still a heretic in many points; but then I trust to your kind intercession, and that of——"

"Oh then, if that be the case, my dear," exclaimed the kind-hearted old lady, interrupting her before she should have time to make any further attack upon her conscience, which she now persuaded herself told her to refuse the admission of a heretic, "if that be the case, put it out of your head. It is not your vocation. God can show you his light in the synagogue of the Jews, as well as in the convent of Santa

Catarina ; and in his holy time I do not doubt but he will. In the mean time, my dear young friend, return to the world ; act your part there in prosperity as nobly as you have done here in adversity ; and never give your poor old friend cause to regret that she did not cheat you into becoming a nun, by concealing from you that it is in your power to become a wife !” and the old woman embraced her lovely young friend in a torrent of kindly tears.

Gertrude for a moment feared her brain had turned : “ What in the name of Heaven can you mean, my dearest madam ?” then, turning pale with sudden apprehension, she exclaimed, “ Is—is — Monsieur de l’Espoir come back to claim me ?”

“ No, my child ; the Count de l’Espoir is gone to that place from whence he never can return to trouble you more. Gertrude, you have been a widow for more than four months !”

Gertrude stood transfixed for one moment, the picture of horror and amazement : yes, notwithstanding all that she had suffered, and all

that she had expected still to suffer, the first sensations produced by this awful announcement were horror and amazement.

“ Take courage, my dearest child,” said the kind old lady, taking her cold hand ; “ I see the finger of God in all this : there are happy, happy days in store for you yet.”

The conflict was awakened in Gertrude’s breast ; the rush back upon her heart of the full tide of early feelings, early hopes and wishes, contending with all that, since, had so firmly and conscientiously had possession of it, together with the agitation she had already undergone for the last two days, was too much for her strength ; her kind old friend assisted her to gain her couch, to which she was confined in a sharp fit of illness for nearly three weeks.

At the end of that time she was able to receive a visit from Vandeleur : he had of course been made acquainted with the sudden change in her circumstances and prospects ; and although his first feeling, it must be acknowledged, was rapturous joy, with loverlike ap-

prehensions, he soon began to torment himself on the subject of Gertrude's late coldness ; and, by the time that she was sufficiently recovered to receive a visit from him, he had worked himself into a state bordering upon despair.

In this frame of mind he stood in the little sitting-room of the cottage, anxiously but tremulously expecting her appearance ; and such was the excess of his agitation upon hearing her light step advancing from the inner chamber, that he was obliged to turn hastily to the window to conceal it. When he heard the door open, he still remained standing with his back towards it. Gertrude was astonished, for she knew that he must have heard her enter. She shut the door, and, advancing a few steps, stood still in the middle of the room ; still he did not move or seem as if he heard her. At last she softly pronounced his name, and, as if from compulsion, he slowly turned at the call ; but betrayed a countenance so full of anxiety and emotion, that Gertrude was no longer at a loss to ac-

count for his wishing to conceal it ; and there was mingled with its expression a sort of manly mortification that seemed to say, “ You see what I am reduced to, but I cannot help it ! ”

Gertrude felt tenderly affected : she could not for a moment hesitate between mere conventional forms, and the keeping such a heart in unnecessary suspense ; “ that, indeed,” she said to herself, “ would be making no distinction between the reality and the shadow.” She advanced at once, though with an air of conscious timidity, and held out her hand to him. He gazed one anxious moment in her face before he accepted it : apparently he was satisfied with what he saw there ; for with a sort of smothered groan of rapture—if one has ever heard such a thing,—he caught her in his arms, and was about to call her his own for ever, when she, hastily stepping back, placed her hand upon his mouth, and with her sweetest smile, while she bashfully averted her eyes, gently whispered “ Not yet.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

(Which may be omitted if the Reader pleases.)

And happily I have arrived at last
Unto the wished haven of my bliss.

“OH ! mamma,” exclaimed the lovely young Countess of Milford, who with her husband had arrived in London that evening from their mansion in Wales, in time for one of her mother’s elegant *soirées*, “oh ! mamma, I have found her out ! I am quite sure I have found out which is your beautiful heroine and friend ; and I am so glad you did not bring me to her, that I may have the credit of the discovery.”

“Provided always that you are right, Theodosia,” said her mother, smiling fondly and a little archly upon her.

“Oh ! I *am* right ! I *must* be right ! no one else could be so beautiful and yet so peculiar-looking ! I never saw anything before like the

expression of her countenance ; something so beaming, so refulgent in its happiness, and yet so sweet and chastened, that it gives one the idea, not of earth but of heaven, or at least of one already purified from the dross of earth and the fear of sorrow. It must be she : look here, mamma, between these two persons' shoulders, and you will see who I mean, with a fine-looking man, whom I never saw before, standing beside her."

"It is indeed she, my own Theodosia ; and that fine-looking man is her husband, Mr. Vandeleur."

"He is the picture of happiness too ; I declare they are quite lions in their happiness."

"I am rather surprised at *your* thinking them so for *that* reason, my own gay, happy Theo."

"Yes : but you know, mamma, I don't often see my own face, except when cross and wearied with the trouble of dressing ; and you must observe yourself how different her happiness appears from that of all around her,—so calm, so placid, yet, as I said before, so absolutely refulgent that it seems to shine abroad on us all."

“That is because she has been tried in adversity; and the blessings that *we* thoughtlessly receive as almost our due, she has learned to appreciate as the free and especial mercies of Him who showed her how little they can be commanded without his will. Your observations, my child, are acute and just. I never saw, I never expected to see, such happiness on earth as they enjoy; I really sometimes think it is permitted to them, in order to prove to us that such may be still enjoyed on earth, if we would not ourselves destroy it. You know they at present live in a beautiful little place of mine in ——shire, close to Seaton, because Beauton Park is in lease; and indeed I imagine Gertrude rejoices that it is so, for some time; until, as she says herself, she becomes by degrees more accustomed to the thoughts of returning there. I’m sure I shall dread it, for their settling near me has been a powerful accession of happiness to me.”

“Are they then really agreeable companions, mamma, apart from your peculiar interest in them?”

“Preeminently so : they have each cultivated their minds to the utmost, and each have ardent feelings ; he has seen a great deal of life, and she has an incessant flow of imagination. I don’t think I ever had three happier days than I spent with them soon after their arrival last autumn. I was alone at Seaton,—you had gone away from London after your marriage, and your father and brother being detained there by some parliamentary business, I hastened to Seaton before them, and drove over the very evening of my arrival to visit my dear friends in their new abode. I was told they were out walking ; I sent my ponies away to the stables, and strolled out myself in search of them : it was a most lovely evening ; and as there is no room for scenery or magnificent timber at “Le Bouquet,” it is a very paradise of flowers and flowering shrubs, which, in a dewy autumn evening, do really call out all that ever was less than sordid and artificial in one’s feelings ; and, old as I am, I felt their influence so strongly upon that occasion, that, while wandering through

the little wilderness of sweets, I became quite romantic, and worked myself up to expect that happiness which the soul sometimes dreams of, but so seldom sees. I was not disappointed : I found the Adam and Eve of this little paradise, seated under one magnificent lime-tree which is in their lawn, and which forms an arbour of itself. Mr. Vandeleur had their eldest boy upon his knee, and Gertrude a sweet baby in her arms : her head was leaning on her husband's shoulder ; but what was my surprise, when I advanced closer, to perceive that she was in tears ! They both started up on seeing me ; and at the first moment, yielding to custom, I affected not to have noticed Gertrude's tears : she dried them off instantly, and smiling said,

“ Nay, duchess, you must not be a hypocrite with me, nor must you be so indifferent about me as not to be anxious to ask the cause of my weeping : it was not sorrow ; indeed, I rather think it was the contrary. I had just been wishing that my ever beloved, lamented Herbert could be witness now to the happiness I

enjoy ; and Godfrey was endeavouring to persuade me that it probably constitutes some of his own happiness above, and that he is only spared from the knowledge of aught that could afflict him : or if the purified spirits have perfect knowledge,—and it is hard to reconcile their having any, and not all,—he thinks it probable that in their extended foresight they smile at our little misfortunes here, as we do at the mimic woes of childhood, which we scarcely would remove, for the very sake of the transient variety they afford to them and to ourselves.”

“ I suppose this little fellow’s name is Herbert ?” I observed, kissing the loveliest boy I ever beheld.

“ No,” she answered, “ Godfrey kindly proposed that it should be, but I could not bear to hear that name profaned even by that beloved being ;” and she nearly smothered the boy with kisses in his father’s arms, to make amends for the seeming slight.”

We returned towards the house, the conversation still continuing in a religiously philosophic

strain ; and will you laugh at your mother, my Theodosia, when I tell you that so happy, so charmed, so elevated did I feel by the sight of their happiness, and its rational and diffusive nature, that I sent for Palmer and my dressing-box, and continued with them till the duke returned.

“ But you are very happy yourself, my dearest mamma ; are you not ?” exclaimed the young countess, suddenly struck with the rapturous manner in which her still lovely and admired mother spoke of the happiness of others ; a subject upon which she never remembered to have heard her expatiate before.

“ Happy, my sweet child ! I am most happy ; how could yours and Clandalton’s mother be otherwise than happy ? But still my happiness is now of a nature so different from theirs, that the variety is delightful ; for though in point of calculation I am but a few years older than Gertrude, yet her feelings of wedded love and happiness are in their first youth still, with all the additional glow and fervour of long suffering turned

into the fruition of joy, while mine have of course sunk into the calm quiet of long habit."

" You think then, mamma, that the habit of loving even one's husband, and being perfectly happy always, deadens one to the enjoyment of it?" inquired the young countess, still almost a bride, with an expression of melancholy in her lovely face.

Her mother did not wish to enter into the subject too closely. " Why, no indeed, my love, I do not ; I scarcely know what I did mean, except what I tried to express at first ; namely, that very young people are so prone to happiness, it is so much their natural state as it were, that they are scarcely more conscious of the blessing than they are of the advantage of having hands or feet ; but when so many years have been spent in the school of discipline and adversity, one not only knows the true value of happiness, but ventures almost to feel that their dark hour, such as all must have on earth, has passed by, and that the future will be all sunshine : such, at least, I know are Gertrude's

and Mr. Vandeleur's feelings ; but then their case is indeed a rare one, and can scarcely be tried by common rules."

" She is a lovely-looking creature at all events ; how long does she remain with you, mamma ?"

" Only till to-morrow," answered the Duchess of Castleton ; " nothing can detain either of them more than a few days from their home : she remained this day solely for the pleasure of seeing you."

" Oh, then I must not indeed lose another moment in making her acquaintance. Come, mamma, and present me."

" Yes ; but I should be sorry to think that this were all you should see of her, or she of you, my love. You must make a point of coming to Seaton this summer, where you have not now been for some years, but where I hope to persuade your father to pass most of his summers in future. I always loved Seaton, but now it has double fascination for me. Mrs. Vandeleur is a first-rate amateur painter ; she per-

fected herself in the art in her seclusion, and has done some beautiful pieces which now ornament my gallery : three of them are historical pieces, if I may call them so, of the most critical moments of her own eventful life ; two of them she did in her cottage in Switzerland, and the third she has done since at Mr. Vandeleur's request. I want her to do one more, choosing for the subject the evening I found them and their sweet children seated under the lime-tree, in order to show the happiness they now enjoy ; but hitherto I have been unsuccessful : sometimes she says she no longer has sufficient leisure for painting, and at other times asserts that paintings are only meant to commemorate what has already passed away. But come, love, we have indulged in a *tête-à-tête* too long."

And so, gentle Reader, perhaps have you and I : so, fare thee well !

THE END.







